

**“TODAY HAS BEEN ABOUT SUCCESS”: YOUNG  
MOTHERS’ UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE WAYS A  
SCHOOL FOR TEENAGE PARENTS SUPPORTS  
SUCCESS**

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“Oaks grow strong in country winds and diamonds are formed under pressure.”

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“As ye have faith so shall your powers and blessings be. This is the balance – this is the balance – this is the balance.” Abdul Baha

## **Abstract**

Teen pregnancy in New Zealand has been constructed as a multifaceted problem, which has prompted scrutiny into the lives of pregnant and parenting teens and their children. Research largely presents teen mothers as ‘at risk’ parents and high school drop outs, with high rates of welfare dependence. Teen parents are considered unlikely to achieve the educational and economic success of their non-parenting peers. This research considers the impact of the experience at a Teen Parent Unit (TPU) on the ways pregnant and parenting teens understand and achieve success.

Using a qualitative case study of a Teen Parent Unit in an urban setting in New Zealand, this thesis documents the experiences and perspectives of four young women. Its aim is to detail, explain and interpret the ways these pregnant and parenting teens understand their developing identities as successful students and parents.

Drawing on social constructionist perspectives, the views of the young women participants, and of the researcher have been analysed through a conceptual lens of culturally responsive pedagogical theory. Comparisons are made between the culture of success that has been developed in the Teen Parent Unit setting and that of schools which have engaged in Māori culturally responsive pedagogical practice.

This thesis offers a strengths-based analysis of an environment which, by reframing expectations of success, presents a challenge to negative academic and societal expectations of pregnant and parenting teens. Its goal is to provide educators, social support agencies, education and social policy makers with an analysis of approaches that have made important differences in the lives of the young women and their children.

## **Chapter 1 – Introduction and review of literature**

In this thesis I describe a qualitative case study of a Teen Parent Unit (TPU). My aim in this study is to detail, explain and interpret the ways the pregnant and parenting teens understand their developing identities as successful students and parents. Through documenting the experiences and perspectives of the four young women at the centre of this study, I hope to provide social support agencies, educators and policy makers in education with a fine-grained analysis of approaches that made important differences in the young women's lives, as well as the lives of their children. In undertaking this project, I engage in a strengths-based analysis of one Teen Parent Unit in New Zealand, which I have named Unity College for the purpose of this thesis. Strengths-based practice affirms individuals, acknowledges their strengths and their right to autonomy and focusses on building on strengths, rather than highlighting deficits (Drewery, Crocket, & Harker, 2003; Child, Youth and Family, 2005; Health & Disability Advocacy, 2009; Net-inc, 2009). The title of this thesis comes from a speech given by the Unity College Director at the school Prize Giving. It speaks to the focus of the school on affirming the strengths of the pregnant and parenting teens attending the TPU through supporting success. One of the challenges Unity College faces is reframing academic and social understandings of teenage pregnancy, so that students can feel successful in any and all of their identity roles: as parents, students, teenagers, children, partners and more. I have used participants' words as often as possible in this thesis to honour their commitment to this research, and value their authentic voices. Pseudonyms are used to protect the students' identity and that of the TPU.

In this chapter I explain my interest in the area of teenage pregnancy, parenting and education. I look at historical contexts of teen pregnancy, both in New Zealand and internationally, and popular culture and wider societal views of teen pregnancy. I introduce social constructionism as the theoretical framework underpinning my project and move into a review of relevant literature. I then outline my research questions and provide an overview of the chapters to come.

### **Background and context for the study**

My interest in the area of teenage pregnancy and parenting stems from the experiences of my parent, who established a study group for 'young mums' and their babies when I was twelve

years old. This study group evolved into one of four New Zealand ‘Teen Parent Pilot Projects’, (Hindin-Miller, 2012) with government funding for childcare, and some years later a fully funded and provisioned Teen Parent Unit. My interest in education stems from my spiritual background, which has given me a belief in the transforming power of education. This can be summed up by this quote: “Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom...” (Baha’u’llah, 1990, p. 259-260). In my teens I grew familiar with teen pregnancy and parenting, and became frustrated with societal (mis)conceptions of young parents. I believe these (mis)conceptions have arisen because of a number of factors. One is racial stereotyping, with Māori and Pacific teens having children at a higher rate than other groups in New Zealand; another is socio-economic or class prejudice, stemming from resentment at young parents’ perceived extensive welfare entitlements, which many consider ‘bludging’ (Breheny & Stephens, 2010); and the third is the increasing age of first-time New Zealand mothers (Statistics New Zealand, 2009). In the 1960s in New Zealand, the median age of first time mothers was 22, with the average age being 23. Teen pregnancy was seen as relatively ‘normal’; now, with increased access to effective contraception, and greater numbers of women in paid employment, the cultural norm is of a much older first time mother, with 30 being both the average and median age of first birth in 2009 (ibid). These factors have contributed to the construction of young pregnancy as a ‘problem’.

I discuss literature more fully later in the chapter, but for some context, to date, the majority of research into teenage pregnancy has largely been medically based studies looking at the ‘problem’ of teen pregnancy (Schinke, 1998; Fergusson & Woodward, 2000; Woodward, Fergusson, & Horwood, 2001a; Woodward, Horwood, & Fergusson, 2001b; Amin, Browne, Ahmed, & Sato, 2006). Internationally, and here in New Zealand, this research has evolved from describing teen pregnancy as a moral problem, to a problem of certain ethnic groups, to a health problem, and now the problem is largely framed as one of socio-economic disadvantage and state dependence. Teen pregnancy literature in an American context is historically written through a lens of ‘immorality’, as teen parents were previously known as unwed mothers (Schinke, 1998; Amin et al., 2006; Hallman, 2007; Scholl, 2007; Roxas, 2008). The ‘social reality’ for pregnant and parenting teens was one of judgement; ‘they’ had broken the Judeo-Christian social ‘rules’ that governed society.

Unity College challenges the ‘social reality’ of moral judgement that lingers around teen pregnancy and parenting and creates a new ‘social reality’ for its students: an expectation of success in every aspect of their lives. A case study methodology has allowed me to ‘identify and describe’ the environment Unity College has created for its pregnant and parenting teens. I found this a necessary precursor as not all Teen Parent Units in New Zealand operate in the same way. Not all provide the same services, and some privilege a young parent’s identity as a student and learner over their other identity roles. A case study methodology has enabled me to expand from description to an interpretation of the ways young parents understand their identities as successful students and parents, and a valuing of what ‘they’ bring to school (Gay, 2002; Bishop, 2003, 2007; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Macfarlane, Cavanagh, Glynn, & Bateman, 2007; Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh, & Teddy 2009; Bishop, O’Sullivan, & Berryman, 2010; Meyer, Penetito, Hynds, Savage, Hindle, & Sleeter, 2010). In this thesis I have chosen a qualitative approach and social constructionist theoretical framework which enable me to critique deficit framings of teen pregnancy, on the basis that age alone does not make a parent ‘capable’ or ‘incapable’ of raising a healthy, happy, successful child.

### **The theoretical framework of social constructionism**

Social constructionism, as I understand it, arose as a challenge to positivist views of a knowable ‘truth’, or objective means of understanding what something definitively ‘is’. This positivist or empiricist way of understanding the world has traditionally been the focus of the ‘hard sciences’. Social constructionists are interested in ways of understanding that are historically and culturally located, come about through social processes and interactions, and are strongly influenced by the language used to describe or represent them (Burr, 1996). For example, in my above description of teen pregnancy, it could be said that young parents were a social and cultural ‘norm’ in New Zealand prior to and including the 1960s. In the 1970s moral, racial and economic discourses combined to ‘problematise’ teen pregnancy. This discursive change has influenced the ‘accepted position’ on teen pregnancy and parenting, or our “accepted ways of understanding the world” (Burr, 1996, p. 4). This example suggests that the acceptance of teen pregnancy was time and culture bound, relating to New Zealand in the 1960s, not a fixed or permanent understanding, or ‘truth’. In the 1970s, through a cultural change based on social processes, with certain cultural groups having children younger than other groups; changing economic perspectives influencing attitudes to welfare entitlements; alongside changing language use or discourse, teen pregnancy in New Zealand became a

social construct, and this construction was positioned as a ‘problem’. This fluidity of change over time suggests that we can negotiate our understandings of how we see the world.

Social constructionism is also concerned with ideas of identity, and specifically ideas of identity and power. I have spent some time considering the importance of these areas in my thesis. Burr states that: “...claims to truth and knowledge are important issues, and lie at the heart of discussions of identity, power and change...” (1996, p. 49). In the case of teen pregnancy and parenting, when having children in your teens became socially constructed as ‘problematic’, young parents were ‘othered’ (Harrison, MacGibbon & Morton, 2001; Macartney, 2011) and disempowered. This has an impact on the ways pregnant and parenting teens understand their identities as teenagers and parents. “...[O]ur identity is constructed out of the discourses culturally available to us, and which we draw upon in our communications with other people” (Burr, 1996, p. 51).

Fortunately, social constructionism disputes ideas of a fixed identity, or a fixed universal ‘truth’. Accordingly, this theoretical framework allows for the reframing of discourses of teen pregnancy and parenting. I am interested in the experiences of four young parents attending a Teen Parent Unit where the dominant discourses of society in regards to teen pregnancy are rejected and reframed. “For each of us, then, a multitude of discourses is constantly at work constructing and producing our identity” (Burr, 1996, p. 53). I look at the impact of these new discourses on the construction of identities as successful students and parents. As I have mentioned I am consciously choosing to use language that challenges the assumption that teenage pregnancy is a ‘problem’. I am writing a critique of what I and other social constructionists call ‘deficit based’ research, and instead construct my argument from a ‘strengths-based’ perspective. It is my hope that this thesis will sit alongside other works that reject deficit constructions of teenage pregnancy and parenting, instead contributing to a new counter story of teen pregnancy and educational success.

## **Review of literature**

In this section I provide an historical context to the ‘problem’ of teen pregnancy and parenting. I begin by looking at international and New Zealand research into young pregnancy. This literature is largely quantitative and scientific or medical based, and is now being challenged by a pool of researchers who critique it as ‘deficit’ research. I then look at ‘public pedagogies’, media representations of teen parents and the way this has shaped



societal perspectives on teen pregnancy. From this negative framing I then present and consider qualitative responses to deficit research, reframing of teenage pregnancy discourse and Teen Parent Unit literature. I look at theorizing the TPU classroom as a culture-in-the-making, before looking at *culturally responsive pedagogies*, particularly how they can be applied to a Teen Parent Unit's culture and practices, which make students feel successful. I close by considering holistic views of school 'success'.

## **A historical perspective of the 'problem' of teen parents today**

### An international context

I am grouping international quantitative literature on teen pregnancy under one heading, although there are differences in national and local provisions for, cultural and ethnic understandings of, and health and education system responses to teen pregnancy. International literature on teen pregnancy forms the backdrop for New Zealand literature in the same field. Teen pregnancy began being discussed as a 'problem' from the 1960s onwards. Before this time it was commonplace for teens to be married and starting families (Schinke, 1998; SmithBattle, 2006; Hallman, 2007; Scholl, 2007; Simic, 2010). An American historical context for the 'problem' of teen pregnancy states that from the 1960s onwards:

Increasing numbers of youths had children out of wedlock, and many young parents rejected earlier conventions that dictated giving up those babies for adoption. Generations of teenage parents became a new reality. Economic maldistribution, racial inequality, and disparities in family values between social classes contributed to rising pregnancy rates among adolescents (Schinke 1998, p. 56).

Teenage pregnancy has been 'problematised' in various ways in international quantitative research ever since.

In American, Australian and British literature, this 'problem' has moved through various stages. It has gone from a moral crisis, where the 'unwed mother' has become the 'teen mother' (Schinke, 1998; Zachry, 2005; Hallman, 2007; Simic, 2010), breaking Judeo-Christian traditions. "Unwed adolescent mothers were scorned, punished, shamed and blamed" (Scholl, 2007, p. 28). From morality discourses, teen pregnancy has become

classified as a racial ‘problem’, where rates of teen pregnancy are higher among indigenous cultures and minority ethnicities:

Teen pregnancy statistics are particularly high for minority youth in poor and working class urban areas. Twenty-five percent of teen births occur to African-American teens, and twenty-eight percent occur to Latina teens, despite the fact that African Americans and Latinas each account for only fifteen percent of the total teenage population (Roxas, 2008, p. 2).

Teen pregnancy has also been framed as a health ‘problem’, where young parents and their children’s health are critiqued and dissected. “Teen pregnancy is closely linked to a number of other critical issues, including overall child and family well-being” (The National Campaign, 2011).

Today, teen pregnancy remains a ‘problem’ of socio-economic or class groups. Economic discourse runs through the vast majority of literature I have read, whether quantitative or qualitative. Largely the discussion revolves around the ‘crisis’ of persistent rates of teen pregnancy in regard to the economic impact it has on families and the State. Teen parents, particularly those who are uneducated, are seen to run the risk of long-term financial dependency (Schinke, 1998; Zachry, 2005; Hallman, 2007; Scholl, 2007; Vincent, 2007; Roxas, 2008; Simic, 2010). These parents are less likely to get well-paying jobs, pay less in taxes, and are characterized by persistently high rates of welfare dependence (Schinke, 1998; Zachry, 2005; Hallman, 2007; Scholl, 2007; Vincent, 2007; Roxas, 2008; Simic, 2010). One British article considers the reasoning behind such an economic perspective:

[I]t seems likely that the thinking behind this view relates firstly to the need for an educated and skilled workforce to ensure the United Kingdom’s economic competitiveness in the global marketplace and secondly, to the fears of welfare dependency associated with teenage pregnancy. It is the latter that is highlighted most frequently in the media through stereotypes such as young women becoming pregnant to access council housing. What we have then is a political and public discourse that presents teenage pregnancy as costly both to the individuals concerned and to the state (Vincent, 2007, p. 16).

It is this construction of teen parents as a multifaceted ‘problem’, with an ongoing focus on economic burden, that contributes to the negative views of teen parents in Western society.

### A New Zealand context

New Zealand research into teen pregnancy has been influenced by its international forebears. American morality discourse, which grew into medical, racial and economic discourses of teen pregnancy, has influenced New Zealand based research in the same area. Medical research largely looks at the ‘problem’ of teen pregnancy and ways of ‘solving the problem’ or reducing the incidence of teen pregnancy (Fergusson & Woodward, 2000; Woodward et al., 2001a; Woodward et al., 2001b).

A seminal piece of New Zealand medical research into teenage pregnancy and parenting is the longitudinal cohort study conducted through the Christchurch School of Medicine (Woodward et al., 2001a). It is important to note that this study was not initially focused exclusively on teen pregnancy, rather it was broadly looking at child health. The cohort comprised 1265 children born in Christchurch in mid-1977. Of the 533 young women in this cohort, studied annually until they were 16 and regularly until 21 years of age, 136 had been pregnant. The data collected from those women forms the most comprehensive piece of quantitative research into young pregnancy, currently available in New Zealand. I argue this because the researchers have released a number of papers on teen pregnancy using the same data over a ten year period. They have also released papers using this cohort data in areas outside teen pregnancy.

This is a large scale study which followed a significant pool of young people through pregnancy and beyond. It was widely distributed among medical practitioners in New Zealand and attracted significant international attention (Breheny & Stephens, 2010), reflecting a widespread interest in the ‘problem’ of teen pregnancy and its ‘solutions’. The abstract of this study, viewed through the lens of social constructionist theory, illustrates a medical discourse of young pregnancy as the failing of individuals and their families:

Young women who became pregnant were characterised by higher rates of educational under-achievement, conduct problems, sexual risk taking, family adversity, and were more likely to identify themselves as Māori. Amongst those who became pregnant, there was a tendency for young women with a

personal history of family adversity to be more likely to proceed with their pregnancy and become young mothers (Woodward et al., 2001a, p. 2).

Factors such as conduct problems, sexual risk taking, ethnicity and family struggles (Fergusson & Woodward, 2000; Woodward et al., 2001a; Woodward et al., 2001b) are consistently talked about in medical research and have contributed to a social construction of teenaged parents as a health problem; a moral problem; a problem of Māori and Pacific Island New Zealanders in particular. The association of ethnicity with other ‘problems’ is alarming in and of itself, but is not the focus of this review.

Young parents are considered deficient when compared to ‘normal aged’ parents and accordingly warrant increased scrutiny and research, in order to classify and adjust ‘their’ behavior (Breheny & Stephens, 2010; Simic, 2010). In New Zealand the median and average ages of a first time mother in 2009, the most recent data I am able to access, is 30 (Bascand, 2009) *see Appendix A*. This was previously considered ‘elderly’, according to my mother, who was criticized for having me, her eldest, at 28. In contrast, I was considered ‘young’, having my first at 28. The discourse of teenage parents as deficient contributes to the negative societal construction of teenaged pregnancy, which forms the backdrop to the environment in which all Teen Parent Units, and Unity College in particular, operate.

The cohort study is a significant piece of longitudinal research. Other studies have looked at the ‘problem’ of teen pregnancy and parenting in New Zealand, but none have the longevity of the Woodward et al., (2001a; 2001b) work. The challenge when considering this research is that the sample group was born in 1977. This means that those pregnant teens aged between 14 and 19 were pregnant between 1991 and 1996. That is fifteen to twenty years ago. Demographics around teen pregnancy may have changed, socio-economic conditions around the pool of 2012 teen parents may have changed, and birth rates have changed in this time (Bascand, 2011) *see Appendix B*. Money has been poured into sexual health education. Sexual and Reproductive Health Strategies have been launched by the New Zealand Government, including resource books for health care organisations. The Right Honorable Annette King, former Minister for Health says:

We have to do better in the area of contraception. Research tells us that up to 60 percent of pregnancies in New Zealand may be unplanned. That means some babies do not have an optimal start to life. And babies born to very

young women and into families that are already finding it hard to cope are not having the best start to their lives either. Increasing abortions is not the best solution (Ministry of Health, 2003).

Despite the Minister's opinion, abortion rates have increased by more than 10 per 1000 pregnancies in 11 – 19 year olds between 1991 and 2011 (Statistics New Zealand, 2009) *see Appendix C*. Societal views on sexuality have also moved in the last fifteen to twenty years, with a growing acceptance and 'normalisation' of "sex before and outside of marriage" (Simic, 2010, p. 434).

Nineteen Teen Parent Units have been created in New Zealand to address the educational needs of young parents (Dimock, personal communication, 11 October, 2011). As of May 2012, the Minister for Social Development has announced intentions to provide long term beneficiaries and teen mothers with free long-term contraception in order to reduce the number of teen parents and particularly the number of 'repeat' teen parents. It is hard to definitively say that the Woodward et al. (2001a; 2001b) study accurately depicts the circumstances of all teen parents in New Zealand in 2012, particularly those accessing and succeeding in education at Teen Parent Units (Wylie, Hodgen, Hipkins, & Vaughan, 2008), which did not exist at the time of the longitudinal study.

### **Teen parents as the 'other' – socially constructed and popular media views of teen pregnancy and parenting**

Breheny & Stephens (2010) conducted a literature review into medical discourses around teen pregnancy and parenting. They were focused on the social construction of teen pregnancy and parenting in quantitative research, and its implications for scientific practice and further research. Their findings illustrated alarming language use in medical journals which were broken into four discourses: "...a 'Public Health' discourse, an 'Economic' discourse, an 'Ethnicity' discourse and a 'Eugenics' discourse" (ibid., p. 309). Each of these discourses positioned young mothers as a 'problem', and each built on the level of 'problem' until a reader is not sure if young pregnancy is a 'problem' in itself, or rather the 'type' of young people who become young parents are the 'problem'. Breheny & Stephens conclude:

These discourses are deployed compatibly to produce a coherent subject: the financially dependent, ethnic minority member who is psychologically,

physically and educationally unprepared for parenthood and whose reproduction produces disadvantage for the individual and the state. Teenage mothers are viewed in the professional literature as poor candidates for motherhood, as economically dependent and as refusing to access abortion services (2010, p. 318).

Alongside these deficit discourses of teen parents in medical and scientific literature, popular culture and media discourses further frame who and what teen parents 'are'. These discourses are increasingly being referred to as 'public pedagogies', (Schubert, 2010) and provide a limited representation of the teenage parent. Two television examples in America are the reality television series *16 and Pregnant*, and its spin off show *Teen mom*. Both shows have aired for three seasons, with further filming in the pipelines. According to the media release for Season 3 of *16 and Pregnant*:

Each story offers a unique look into the wide variety of challenges pregnant teens face: marriage, adoption, religion, gossip, finances, rumors among the community, graduating high school, getting (or losing) a job. Faced with incredibly adult decisions, these girls are forced to sacrifice their teenage years and their high school experiences (Music Television, 2011).

Shows such as these often focus on high drama, revelling in conflict and violence. They contribute to the 'othering' of teen parents, and position teen parents as public fodder, whose lives are played out for the entertainment of the masses. *Teen mom*, which follows the girls from *16 and Pregnant* from their pregnancies into child rearing, was the MTV cable network's top new series of 2009, with a viewership of 2.1 million people in the United States alone (Weprin, 2009).

The United States has a National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. In a blog linked to the *Teen mom* and *16 and Pregnant* MTV sites, the CEO of the National Campaign attributes a nine per cent decrease in births to teen parents in part to the popularity of the two shows: "Teens are being more careful for a number of reasons, including the recession, more media attention to this issue - including the '16 and Pregnant'/'Teen Mom' effect..." (Chudnofsky, 2011). The suggestion here is that 'othering' teen pregnancy and parenting through popular media discourses has reduced its incidence.

## **Teen Parent Unit literature – a challenge to deficit constructions of young pregnancy and parenting**

While historical literature and public perceptions of teen pregnancy and parenting makes for grim reading, there is a growing pool of research that challenges deficit constructions of teen pregnancy and parenting (Paki, 2002; Collins, 2005, 2010; Zachry, 2005; SmithBattle, 2006; Poelzleitner 2007; Vincent, 2007; Cubey, 2009; Breheny & Stephens, 2010; Simic, 2010). Some of this research looks at the impact of Teen Parent Units (TPUs) on students' lives; case studies of specific TPUs; the relationship between teen parents' access to education and their employment opportunities, and more. There is a consistent theme in much of this research, of rebelling against the 'Other-ing' of young parents, and of voicing the merits of dedicated schools for pregnant and parenting teens. While Bernadette Macartney was interested in disability studies, our research overlaps in terms of treatment of 'others' by majority groups in society. These qualitative studies see teen parents as,

The 'other' [being] expected to conform to the dominant group's set of universal ethics, rules, norms, values, codes and dominant understandings whilst the dominant group continue to benefit from society operating according to their ways of thinking and being (Macartney, 2011, p.2).

Some of these studies argue, as I will, that young parents, who have often had negative educational experiences, have a compelling reason to engage in school at a Teen Parent Unit, and contribute to building a positive relationship with their teachers (Collins, 2005, 2010; Zachry, 2005; Hallman, 2007; Scholl, 2007; Roxas, 2008; Cubey, 2009). Elizabeth Zachry conducted a qualitative study in the United States using a grounded theory approach, which focussed on the views nine teenaged mothers had about re-engaging in school. She found that:

Although each stated that her pregnancy initially led her to drop out of school, the participants argued that having a child increased their interest in their education and pushed them to see how education would help them provide a better future for their children, increase their employment opportunities, and help them get off public assistance (2005, p. 2566).

In the context of my research, I would argue that Zachry's participants saw their pregnancy as a reason to succeed as students, succeed as parents and succeed as contributing members of society.

Kevin Roxas (2008) undertook a qualitative study based in the American Midwest, known for its disproportionately high rates of teen pregnancy. Like me, he used a conceptual lens of "culturally responsive teaching" (Gay, 2002; Bishop, 2003, 2007; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Macfarlane, 2004; Macfarlane et al., 2007; Roxas, 2008; Bishop et al., 2009; Meyer et al., 2010), in the context of a school for African-American pregnant and parenting teens. I am interested in the work of Roxas with the teachers of, and community surrounding, young parents and parents-to-be, and his aim to provide "...insight into what teachers, administrators, and community members can do to serve this currently underserved student group" (p. 4).

Roxas spent two school years completing his qualitative study in a school chosen because of its successful graduation rates with young parents. In this time, he focussed on six teachers in particular, utilising multiple interviews, participant observations, his own field notes, interviews that revisited the transcribed records of previous sessions, and archival data as his methods of data collection. The fruits of this data were published in three case studies of teachers who were particularly capable of consistently demonstrating 'culturally responsive teaching' practices. Roxas also focussed on the strengths of teachers in his research, and has made a contribution to the counter story of teenage parents and educational success. It was in reading this study that I committed to researching teen pregnancy and parenting for the purpose of achieving my Master in Education degree. It was also this study which solidified my desire to choose students attending a TPU as participants, rather than their teachers, as I saw a gap in the New Zealand literature when it came to young parents being given voice, and being listened to.

### **Reasons for the State providing Teen Parent education provisions, or Teen Parent Units**

I have been struck (rather naively) in reading American research into teen parents and schooling, by the framing of success, or 'successful outcomes' as essentially economic. Young parents are 'problematized' because of their overrepresentation as welfare dependent, non-tax contributing members of society. Similarly the 'solution' is also economic:



...school districts were encouraged to develop policies and programming to meet the unique needs of pregnant and parenting teenagers so that they could complete their education, become productive members of their communities, and lessen the likelihood of their economic dependence on society (Scholl, 2007, p. 29).

‘Productive’ here is strictly economic, nothing is said about the many and varied positive outcomes of access to education. In contrast, the New Zealand Ministry of Education define a Teen Parent Unit as:

...an educational facility attached to a state secondary school (host school) that caters for teen parent students and their children. The purpose of a TPU is to provide for the particular needs of students in secondary education where verified barriers to learning in a school situation have resulted from pregnancy and child-rearing responsibilities (2011).

Further justification for opening a new Teen Parent Unit in an area of New Zealand without such provision states:

The purpose of establishing the young parent schooling unit is overall to strengthen families and their futures by allowing young parents and their children to learn and grow together.... The overall aims of the young parent schooling unit include: Breaking negative cycles; Reducing dependency on the state for this generation and the next generation; Reaching or surpassing the success of similar programmes in other locations; Aiming for excellence in providing quality services for young parents and their children (Paki, 2002, p. 39-40).

While economic impact is still a factor in starting a Teen Parent Unit, more holistic goals are also valued, such as the provision of quality services for young parents, strengthening families through access to education, parents and children growing together in their educational journeys and aiming for success/excellence. Having an emphasis on success is of particular interest, as these expectations influence those involved in teen parent education, and can have a flow on effect to teen parent expectations of success.

## **Theorising the Unity College classroom as a ‘culture-in-the-making’**

In educational research, there are a number of emerging pedagogies which look at culture in a new light. Most of these come from a social constructionist perspective. In looking at how learning is constructed and how learning takes place among students, teachers and peers, Green, Castanheira, & Yeager (2011) played with the idea that classes of students are ‘cultures-in-the-making’. They believe that because students live out an element of their lives with a class of people, and because they grow and learn in this space, classes can be constructed as cultures. Green et al., (2011) began researching the way students constructed learning identities, and moved from a focus on the construction of identity to a focus on the construction of culture.

In the moment-by-moment and overtime interactions among teacher and students, members of the class construct norms and expectations, roles and relationships, and rights and obligations, that constitute members’ cultural knowledge of patterns of life in the classroom.... Classrooms can be viewed as cultures-in-the-making.... Culture is not given but rather is a construct that represents what members of the sustaining group construct to shape what counts as ways of knowing, being and doing in a particular class or group within a class (Green et al., 2011).

Looking at the Unity College classroom in such a light allows me to look at both literature and data through a lens of culturally responsive pedagogies. It also allows me to explore the ways in which a Teen Parent Unit challenges the cultural construction of teenage pregnancy as a moral and economic ‘problem’ and creates its own counter-culture of success. This defines the very purpose of this thesis.

### **Culturally responsive pedagogies**

I look at culturally responsive pedagogies and practices as they relate to teen parents, who, as I have described above, have been ‘othered’ by medical and scientific research and society. Teen parents have often had negative school experiences prior to becoming pregnant (Paki, 2002; Collins, 2005; Hill, Fouché, & Worrall, 2005; Zachry, 2005; Amin et al., 2006; SmithBattle, 2006; Hallman, 2007; Poelzleitner, 2007; Wylie, Stewart, Hope, & Culshaw, 2009), and on becoming parents have unique learning requirements, should they desire to

return to school. I am interested in culturally responsive pedagogies because of their fit with teaching and learning interactions I have observed as part of this research process.

I am drawn to the work of Russell Bishop. Bishop and a pool of researchers/practitioners have spent the last decade implementing the Te Kotahitanga project, which:

[seeks] to address the self-determination of Māori secondary school students by talking with them (and other participants in their education: families, principals and teachers) about their experiences of what is involved in limiting and/or improving Māori students' educational achievement (Bishop et al., 2009 p. 735).

Teen Parent Units aim to improve the educational achievement of teen parents, a group who have similar negative statistics to Māori, when it comes to educational achievement (Bishop, 2003, 2007; Bishop et al., 2009; Wylie et al., 2008). As mentioned in the deficit discussion above, there is a high rate of Māori teen parents in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Teen parents' educational achievement is where my interest in this area started. Te Kotahitanga is a project which stems from Kaupapa Māori and culturally responsive pedagogies. The Te Kotahitanga project looks at the co-construction of meaning in classroom interactions:

Teachers seek to create sociocultural contexts wherein learning takes place actively, reflectively, and where learners can not only use a variety of learning styles, but also have the power to determine which learning styles they need to use.... [S]uch a process of learning therefore allows learners to bring themselves into the interaction; their experiences, their knowledges and aspirations and above all, their variety of sense-making and meaning-constructing processes which will come from and be part of the cultures in which they participate (Bishop, 2003, p. 229).

Culturally responsive pedagogies allow me to explore the ways teaching and learning, and the co-construction of knowledge is 'done' at a Teen Parent Unit. This is crucial to understanding student engagement, and the conditions in which students are able to co-construct new meanings of success. In my reading, I have found that culturally responsive pedagogies also have a basic 'formula' for success. I understand this 'formula' as: when strong teacher/student relationships are nurtured based on awareness of who students are and what

they bring with them to learning conversations; coupled with strong support; high expectations of student achievement; reflective staff practice; and individual goal setting and follow up; a platform is built on which all students can be affirmed in their identities and succeed. This ‘formula’ is particularly relevant to the data chapters of this thesis, none more so than Chapter 4, “I want Excellence in everything I do, because I know I can do it”.

### **A culture of belonging**

Some Kaupapa Māori and New Zealand-situated culturally responsive theories talk about the significance of creating a place where students belong, where it is ‘safe’ to be themselves, where student thoughts and feelings are valued (Bishop, 2003, 2007; Macfarlane et al., 2007; Bishop et al., 2009). From this platform, teaching and learning relationships can be developed that enable students to strive and to achieve. Aspects of what makes a learning community or Whānau successful are ‘manaakitanga’, which can otherwise be termed an ethos of care (Macfarlane et al., 2007; Bishop et al., 2009); ‘kotahitanga’, which relates to unity and belonging (Macfarlane et al., 2007); and ‘whānaungatanga’ (Macfarlane et al., 2007; Bishop et al., 2010), which is the building of relationships based on trust and respect.

I have consciously chosen to incorporate literature which looks at education through a Māori lens, or with a Māori world view in mind. As mentioned above, I reference the Te Kotahitanga project (Bishop 2003, 2007; Bishop et al., 2009; Bishop et al., 2010; Meyer et al., 2010), which looks at the success of Māori students in school, when their culture and their turangawaewae (the place they stand) are taken into account. I also look at work by Professor Angus Macfarlane, who has reworked culturally responsive pedagogical theory within an indigenous New Zealand context. Finally I draw on the holistic model of health and well-being: *Whare Tapa Whā*, created by Professor Sir Mason Durie (1994), which looks at the importance of viewing people as whole beings, rather than looking at one aspect of a life in isolation from the whole. These lenses allow for an exploration of what goes on at Unity College, how teaching and learning are negotiated, and the way staff and students interact.

## **For the purpose of this thesis, what is success?**

### Whare Tapa Whā

A crucial aspect of this project is the notion of success. In the following chapters I hope to explore this idea and challenge narrow understandings of what success looks like at school. Traditionally, success in a classroom has been limited to strict academic attainment, achieving certain grades, passing courses. This can otherwise be termed school performance (Gay 2002; Bishop 2003, 2007; Gay & Kirkland 2003; Macfarlane et al., 2007; Ministry of Education, 2007; Bishop et al., 2009; Meyer et al., 2010). I want to look at a much broader, more holistic view of success, which is relevant to students attending a Teen Parent Unit. In this scenario, success is not black and white. It is not a grade, and it may be quite different for different students.

Professor Sir Mason Durie created a model of integrated well-being called Whare Tapa Whā (1994). This model is widely used in New Zealand health and social service spheres, alongside many other fields today. Whare Tapa Whā provides a holistic view of a human being, with a physical side, (taha tinana) a spiritual side, (taha wairua) an intellectual or psychological side (taha hinengaro) and positions a person within a family or community (taha whānau). I would like to explore success from the perspective of Whare Tapa Whā, with its integrated understanding of a person, not limited to one side or sphere. This also excuses the absence of a spiritual perspective in social constructionist theory, as spirituality and belief in a God or Gods could be seen as concrete truths, which are at odds with constructionist ways of understanding ‘truth’. From the point of view of Whare Tapa Whā, education and educational success cannot exclusively fall in the domain of taha hinengaro – the intellectual or psychological side. Rather success in a school context impacts on an individual’s well-being. It can be argued that success will improve an individual’s physical and spiritual well-being, and community or family life. This framework allows for success to be much more than an ‘Excellence’ or ‘Merit’ grade, or the achievement of a National Certificate of Educational Attainment (NCEA) Level, particularly in relation to the varied identity roles teen parents are playing out in everyday life. It also affords teachers the opportunity to encourage and praise students more broadly, and forge stronger relationships, something identified in culturally responsive pedagogies as critical to success. The importance of learning relationships will be discussed more fully in the data section of this thesis, Chapters 3 and 4.

## The New Zealand Curriculum document

The New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) is an official New Zealand Government policy relevant to teachers and learners at English-medium schools. There is a sister document for Māori-medium schools called Te Marautanga o Aotearoa. It is intended to be a living document, tailored by individual schools and their communities to best reflect each school's uniqueness, while prescribing principles and values for all schools to follow. The New Zealand Curriculum outlines a vision of young, successful New Zealand students. Aspects of this Curriculum provide a theoretical way of looking at success. It talks of:

...young people who will be creative, energetic, and enterprising... who, in their school years, will continue to develop the values, knowledge and competencies that will enable them to live full and satisfying lives... [and] who will be confident, connected, actively involved, and lifelong learners (ibid, p. 8).

This is a more broad perspective than strict academic success, valuing 'creativity', 'energy', 'confidence', 'connectivity', 'involvement' and more. Looking at the development of values and competencies goes beyond grades and rote learning, and requires more of teachers than a strict literacy and numeracy focus. The New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) does drill down to the nuts and bolts of 'reading, writing and maths', while also broadening a commonly held notion of school success. The Curriculum also creates a space to look beyond knowledge retention with this statement: "Students will be encouraged to value: (sic) excellence, by aiming high and by persevering in the face of difficulties;" (ibid, p. 10). Looking at qualities of character, such as perseverance or resilience as indicators of success, sits comfortably alongside the Whare Tapa Whā model of well-being, being a broader and more holistic view encompassing a whole person and their family/community. It is important to note that the New Zealand Curriculum (2007) document is an ideal, not a binding guide to practice. That being said, prioritising the development of character, lifelong learning patterns and relationships with community are all aspects of the successes I wish to explore in this thesis.

Success in a school context has historically been seen as student achievement, receiving passing grades, moving through the year levels and finishing high school with an appropriate qualification. The kind of success I am interested in is much broader than academic courses

passed and marks gained, and has relevance for the lived realities of pregnant and parenting teens. I will call my evolving understanding of success, ‘holistic’ success. To give some examples, success may be becoming an integral part of a community, a whānau, what the Ministry of Education’s New Zealand Curriculum document terms “connectedness” (2007, p. 10). Success may be achieving academic grades and NCEA Levels; it may be a genuine motivation to achieve academic grades and NCEA Levels, regardless of ‘outcome’. Success for pregnant and parenting teens may be engaging as a parent and developing strengths in that area, engaging with early childhood education and loving the role of raising a child or children. Early childhood education is increasingly being linked with ‘lifelong learning success’ (Tyler-Merrick, 2011), so success may be changing patterns of family/whānau involvement in education. It could also be changing behaviour or starting new patterns of behaviour, such as reading to young children every day, creating a new pattern of educational engagement. Success may be a student valuing and prioritising their own health and well-being and that of their child, through changing or improving eating behaviours, getting a drivers’ licence, stopping smoking. Success may be empowerment, the ability to represent one’s own views and those of one’s peers. Success may be engaging with one’s culture and identity for the first time. For the purpose of this thesis, success is an evolutionary term that I hope will become clearer in the following chapters.

### **My research questions**

The research questions that I think best fit my aims in conducting this research are: In what ways do pregnant and parenting teen mothers understand and negotiate teaching and learning in the Unity College classroom? This lead me to ask: How are new meanings of success co-constructed and interpreted in this setting?

### **An overview of the chapters to come**

I begin Chapter Two with a broad look at qualitative research. I then describe case study research more specifically, as it relates to social constructionism, features of qualitative case study research, and outline my research questions. Participants are briefly introduced, including the way they came to take part in this project, and the methods I employed to collect data are explained. Data analysis is discussed, as are the choices I have made about the representation of my findings. Trustworthiness, credibility and ethical considerations are

explored, including doing no harm, confidentiality, collaboration and cultural safety. Finally I explore my lens as a researcher and how this has coloured every aspect of my thesis process.

Chapter Three is the first of two data chapters. It looks at aspects of the school environment that operate to support pregnant and parenting teens' success. I introduce aspects of Māori world views as a lens through which to view the data chapters, and then explore the importance students place on feeling supported in all of their identity roles at Unity College. This is consistent with a culturally responsive pedagogical approach to success. I also consider practical supports that are in place at the Teen Parent Unit, which remove barriers to pregnant and parenting teens accessing school. These are elements of the environment Unity College has created to support its students to succeed. From there I look at the ways the TPU has created a school community/whānau, with different staff members playing different roles in supporting pregnant and parenting teens' success. This community/whānau offers protection against negative societal views and expectations of teenage parents and helps to transform expectations of success.

Chapter Four, the second data chapter, looks at the effects of the environment Unity College has created on student success. Teaching and learning practices are viewed in light of culturally responsive pedagogical theory. I look at the ways the TPU has created a space for success, and a culture of success. I then consider aspects of the academic learning that is carried out, including the importance of students having one on one access to teachers and time to set goals and reflect on progress. In this chapter I look at concrete examples of a culture that is focused on success. The role of teacher accompaniment of students, teacher encouragement of students, and reward and recognition are explored, as they engage students to strive, achieve and succeed.

Chapter Five is a discussion and conclusion chapter. Here I look at the implications of what I have said throughout this thesis. I summarise the choices I have made regarding research design, a theoretical framework of social constructionism and a conceptual lens of culturally responsive pedagogies. I acknowledge that while Unity College is helping its students to reframe success, not all students are in a position to take on these new understandings. I move to reflecting on my lens as a researcher and my positioning of this project as part of a 'counter-story' of teen parent success. I end by applauding second chance education opportunities and Unity College for offering possible new constructions of successful teenage pregnancy and parenting.



## Chapter 2 – Methodology

In this chapter, I outline why I chose a qualitative case study methodology, my use of social constructionism as my theoretical framework, the participants in this research, the tools of my data collection and the approach I took to data analysis. I move into positioning my study in relation to other studies which look at similar areas, the way I have chosen to represent findings, trustworthiness and credibility, and ethical issues and considerations. Finally I discuss and reflect on my lens as a researcher, and how this has affected the shape this piece of work has taken. All of this is considered in light of my research questions: In what ways do pregnant and parenting teen mothers understand and negotiate teaching and learning in the Unity College classroom? And: How are new meanings of success co-constructed and interpreted in this setting?

### Qualitative research and social constructionism

Qualitative research is interested in the lived experiences and understandings of participants, for the purposes of enriching research findings about the area under study. Qualitative research acknowledges the ‘complexity’ (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Janesick, 2003) of people’s lives and interactions with others, and attempts to represent a deeper and richer picture of these lives. Where quantitative research is interested in large sample populations, statistically based data and generalizable conclusions, qualitative research deals with smaller numbers of participants to delve more deeply into understanding their realities within certain contexts.

We use qualitative research as an umbrella term to refer to several research strategies that share certain characteristics. The data collected have been termed *soft*, that is, rich in description of people, places, and conversations, and not easily handled by statistical procedures. Research questions are not framed by operationalizing variables; rather, they are formulated to investigate topics in all their complexity, in context (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 2).

As Mutch (2005 p. 43) suggests, “[q]ualitative research aims to uncover the lived reality or constructed meanings of the research participants... [and allows them] to tell their own stories in their own ways”. As I have already explained, social constructionism is also interested in the construction of meanings (Burr, 1996). Social constructionist perspectives

suggest that meanings are made, unmade and re-made in interaction. Culturally responsive pedagogies (CRP) are largely underpinned by a social constructionist theoretical framework, applied to teaching and learning and classroom interactions. My theoretical choices, regarding the design of this study, have enabled me to pay attention to and understand the making, unmaking and re-making of meanings, within a classroom context, such as what success means to young parents attending a Teen Parent Unit.

Denzin and Lincoln talk about a movement in the field of qualitative inquiry in terms of its application and ability to “address issues of equity and of social justice (2005, p. viii). This perspective, which also reflects elements of social constructionist theory, is one of my aims in embarking on this research journey. Most of the research, cited in Chapter One (Schinke, 1998; Fergusson & Woodward, 2000; Woodward et al., 2001a; Woodward et al., 2001b; Amin et al., 2006), has been conducted ‘on’ young parents, rather than ‘with’ them. Young parents and, in some cases, their own parents, were surveyed or completed questionnaires as methods of data collection. Some studies also analysed participants’ medical and official records. These methods are impersonal and provide results that do not attend to the aforementioned ‘context’ of data. In these studies, the voices and experiences of pregnant and parenting teens are absent. This imbalance of perspective can and does influence policy. Further, societal perspectives are influenced when people in positions of power, such as medical experts, construct the identity of teen parents as a problem or issue to be resolved.

In contrast, there is a growing pool of qualitative research, largely conducted by Teen Parent Educators, Education and Social Work students, who, in response to the type of research described above, are interested in the voices of young parents, their thoughts, experiences and perspectives on their lived realities. What I have attempted, in my research design, can be considered ‘insider’ research (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998), where a relationship is established that enables a researcher to walk alongside participants and come to understand the ways participants make sense of their lives and contexts (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998; Janesick, 2003; Mutch, 2005; Stark & Torrance, 2005). Qualitative research is uniquely positioned to allow me as researcher to delve into aspects of the lives of participants and conduct insider research. It also offers me the possibility of gathering rich, deep descriptions of the ways pregnant and parenting teens understand their identities and their lives. Rather than analysing data from all pregnant and parenting teens attending Teen Parent Units for its statistical merit, my interest is in giving voice to the experiences of a small group

of young parents, and the ways they have come to understand one context within which they operate. I would like my research to sit alongside a new ‘counter story’ in teen parent research, one that challenges the assumption, often put forward in medical research, that pregnancy and parenting at a young age are a ‘problem’. My research focus is particularly concerned with students engaged in schooling at a Teen Parent Unit (Paki, 2002; Taylor, 2002; Collins, 2005, 2010; Hill et al., 2005; SmithBattle, 2006; Hallman, 2007; Poelzleitner, 2007; Scholl, 2007; Roxas, 2008; Cubey, 2009). A case study research design enables me to best answer my research questions, and give voice to the experiences of pregnant and parenting teens, in exploring their perceptions of success at one Teen Parent Unit in New Zealand.

### **Social constructionism and case study research**

Case study assumes that ‘social reality’ is created through social interaction, albeit situated in particular contexts and histories, and seeks to identify and describe before trying to analyse and theorise (Stark & Torrance, 2005, p. 33).

I am interested in the ‘social reality’ staff and students create in the Unity College classroom. In order to accurately represent this ‘social reality’, I have chosen a case study approach, so that I can describe this ‘reality’ before analysing it, by drawing on social constructionist perspectives and culturally responsive pedagogical theory. My choice of case study has also been influenced by Roxas (2008), who conducted multiple case studies using a lens of culturally responsive pedagogies, in order to describe and analyse the teaching practices of successful teachers within their classroom contexts at an alternative school for young parents. Culturally responsive New Zealand theorist, Macfarlane (2004), also used multiple case studies to ‘listen to culture’ in a range of classrooms. He described the social realities of students, analysed teacher practice and used these to theorise a socio-cultural model which draws on culturally responsive pedagogies.

Case studies can provide unique examples of people in real situations. Such studies can penetrate situations and offer insights not easily gained by other approaches. Not surprisingly perhaps, in case study research *contexts* matter (Burgess, Sieminski, & Arthur, 2006, p. 59 *original emphasis*).

Not all Teen Parent Units in New Zealand offer the same services, and not all engage with their students in the same ways. I have mentioned ‘contexts’ throughout this chapter as they are important to anyone engaged in case study research using a theoretical framework of social constructionism. I have attempted to value the authentic voices and experiences of pregnant and parenting students at Unity College in a way that might be useful to policy makers, and those who work with this group of young people. In order to do so, I needed to conduct qualitative case study research, using a social constructionist framework, to explore young parents’ experiences of the Teen Parent Unit (TPU) and offer their ‘insights’ into their school environment. Through valuing the participants’ voices, it is my intention to undertake research in ways that can be empowering for young parents.

### **My evolving research questions**

In 2009 when I submitted my Research Proposal, I was studying a paper which dealt with cross-cultural communication in Aotearoa/New Zealand. I was reading research whose paradigms were Kaupapa Māori and culturally responsive practice. Power dynamics and the interplay of class and ‘outcomes’ were on my mind, having just come from working with young parents at a social services provider, so my first research question was: How do young mothers, fathers and their teachers at a Young Parents’ College successfully negotiate cross cultural boundaries, in terms of educational background, socio-economic status or ‘class’, and ethnicity, and form effective working relationships? As mentioned earlier, I was interested in a strengths-based look at pregnant and parenting teens’ experiences of education, and this generated the “successfully negotiate” element of that question.

My question changed quickly; when I arrived fresh at Unity College, at the start of the 2010 academic year, there were no young fathers enrolled, and none enrolled during the year. When thinking about interview questions to ask participants, I was interested in the ‘real life’ experiences of participants at the TPU, rather than theoretically based questions around differences in their educational/socio-economic backgrounds and those of their teachers. That area also felt obscure; I did not think my participants would relate to that line of questioning.

As a consequence of diving into my data, undertaking inductive or thematic analysis (Richardson & Adams St. Pierre, 2000; Mutch, 2005), and ‘listening’ to what participants had to say, this question has evolved several times. The strongest theme that I have identified, and from my perspective underpinning everything the participants have said, relates to a culture

of success. Taking into account the need of this case study to ‘identify and describe’ the social reality at Unity College, as well as ‘analyse and theorise’ it (Stark & Torrance, 2005), my research question became: What are young mothers’ understandings of the ways in which a school for teen parents supports success? This question is problematic because it implies, against qualitative research paradigms and social constructionist theories, that there is a correct way of understanding the way the TPU operates, in terms of success.

The final evolution of my research questions, from a broad starting point to a more focused view are: In what ways do pregnant and parenting teen mothers understand and negotiate teaching and learning in the Unity College classroom? And: How are new meanings of success co-constructed and interpreted in this setting?

## **Participants**

This research is only available because of the willingness of four young women to participate in a project which aims to be of benefit to other young parents. These young women are Chelsea, Shelley, Lucy and Jane. All four pseudonyms were either chosen by the student, or arbitrarily assigned to them, in order to protect their identity. Their children have also been given monikers, and their genders/ages may have been altered to ensure the confidentiality of each young parent. Each participant had different circumstances which lead them to Unity College, each has their own story. They come from different cultures, socio-economic brackets and backgrounds, which contribute to their unique perspectives as participants in this research.

When I began choosing participants my research question was still ‘under construction’. With the assistance of my supervisors I narrowed my study to include three student participants. Where possible, these students would reflect the diversity at Unity College in terms of their gender, age, the NCEA level they were studying for, the number of children they have, their ethnicity, their parents’ or guardians’ educational backgrounds, socio-economic circumstances, and the length of their enrolment at the TPU. I considered these factors important because they represented a rich opportunity for cross-cultural communication to occur.

In reality, I approached the Director and talked with her about the availability of interested students. She suggested students who would be less distracted in their studies by my

presence. She also recommended an outgoing student, who had completed the requirements of her NCEA Level 3 qualifications and was seeing out the school year. Chelsea became my first participant. Factors around Chelsea, her identification as Pākehā, the length of time she had been enrolled at the school, her middle class background, led me to approach Lucy as a second participant. I had met Lucy in another teen parent context, in my work for a Teen Parent Co-ordinator. She had participated in focus group interviews I had conducted in that role. Lucy identified as a Māori student, she had attended Unity College for one school year, and our prior connection led to her immediately agreeing to participate in this research. When I asked her, as a culturally responsive ‘matter of course’, if she would like a support person or a friend to join her in our interviews, she immediately said yes. Jane became the unexpected third participant in this project. Jane and I knew each other from when my parent was the Director of Unity College. She had positive interactions with my parent, which I am sure contributed to her positive attitude to working with me. Jane had taken a break from Unity College for personal reasons, and was re-enrolled when we re-met. She readily agreed to be interviewed with Lucy and participate in this study.

While we had decided on three participants, I did not feel I had the diversity of student experience to gather rich data. All participants were parenting students, and all were the same age, 19. They were all 16 or 17 when they had their children and they had all attended the TPU for more than a year. Unity College had very few pregnant students at the start of the 2010 academic year. It also had few new students, most were returning from 2009. There were two choices of new students who were willing to participate in this project, one was the same age as the three other participants, and was also a parenting student. She balanced the cultural diversity, identifying as a Māori student, Jane and Chelsea are both Pākehā. The other was a pregnant student who was 14 years old. As I discovered in the course of our interviews, she was also exploring her Māori identity. I believed Shelley would provide a diversity of experience and could make a valuable contribution to this research. I was recommended not to work with Shelley as she had only been at the school for a couple of weeks and had not ‘opened up’ to anyone yet. This made me more interested in her, as she provided an opportunity to view the school through a fresh lens. Contrary to some staff expectation, Shelley was most happy to participate in this project.

## **Data collection**

When thinking about the methods that would prove most useful to collect the rich data from a range of sources, semi structured interviews and participant observations immediately came to mind. Through spending time in the field, document analysis became increasingly relevant. These three methods are outlined below.

### Interviews

I designed the first of two rounds of semi-structured interviews to allow time to build some rapport, start a conversation off about how students came to be at Unity College, what they liked and did not like about the place, and how it compared with their previous school experiences. I was interested in whether participants felt the Teen Parent Unit supported them as students and parents, and, if so, how this support worked. I hoped that these questions were open enough to allow participants to have input into the further direction the discussion could take. I wanted to be ‘tuned in’ to follow their lead if they felt strongly, or not at all, about what we were discussing. This is because I saw research as collaborative and wanted to ensure participants could be involved in the research, rather than my dictating subject matter and getting compliant results (Harrison et al., 2001). I believe that: “The qualitative research interview is a construction site of knowledge. An interview is literally an inner view, an interchange of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest” (Kvale, as cited in Mutch, 2005, p. 127).

The second round of interviews were designed in consultation with my supervisors, to ‘hone in’ on the three biggest emerging themes: that students felt supported in all of their identity roles, that students felt accepted for all of who they are and that Unity College expected all of its students to succeed.

### Participant Observations

As well as interviews, I hoped that participant observations would allow me to see the behaviour I was interested in: elements of an environment that operated to make pregnant and parenting teens feel successful in their identity roles. “Observations puts [sic] you on the trail of understandings that you infer from what you see...” (Glesne, 1999, p. 69). I hoped the observations would provide further rich material that would help me better understand what

my participants were saying. I conducted two observations prior to the first interview with a participant, to get a fresh sense of the environment at Unity College. I did a further two observations alongside the first round of interviews and then two after the first round of interviews was complete.

At this point I spent some time immersing myself in the data and became aware of the three themes mentioned above. Following the second round of interviews, which were carried out at the close of the school year, I conducted five more observations largely around the start of the first school term in 2011. This allowed me to see the way staff enacted their acceptance of students from the beginning of the school year, the ways support concretely worked for new students and the ways young parents were made to feel welcome. All of these areas were identified by participants as crucial aspects of an environment that operated to make them feel successful. In my role as observer, at times I was a participant, for example during singing practice, at times a pure observer, such as when STD tests were being carried out, and at others I was a combination of both (Burgess et al., 2006).

### Document analysis

In familiarising myself with the data I had collected, I became interested in how Unity College creates an environment that operates to make students feel successful. Document analysis alongside observations and interviews provided context for the descriptions, thoughts and views of the participants. It was particularly useful as it enabled me to get copies of speeches that were given at Prize Giving and materials presented to all students at the start of the school year. “Documents represent attitudes, opinions and political directions that may be explicit or part of a hidden agenda” (Burgess et al., 2006, p. 77). Document analysis allowed for richer thematic analysis.

### **Data analysis**

When looking at ways a Teen Parent Unit supports success, I was interested in how the school made students feel welcome, expectations of student achievement and how teaching and learning is ‘done’ at Unity College. I wanted to get a true sense of the ‘culture of the place’. If a focus on success was part of the teaching and learning process, I imagined the language teachers and students used would reflect this in interviews and observations, and this should be revealed as part of the emergent themes during data analysis.



I have utilized thematic analysis for the purpose of this thesis. I started this analysis with interview data: as I listened to recordings and carried out transcription, I highlighted quotes that I found interesting, that sparked my imagination, or that I thought might be useful in the writing stage of the thesis. I also listened for concepts that fit with culturally responsive pedagogies, or those that challenged culturally responsive practice. I moved to colour coding ideas that were repeated by multiple participants, grouping responses to certain interview questions, sub categorizing until I felt I was actually taking away from the whole, rather than fruitfully analysing the data. For example, an initial category of 'TPU vs Previous high school experience' became 'CRP teaching and learning'. The broad category 'Support' evolved into 'Identity roles' and 'School community/whānau'.

At this point, I became aware of several potential themes that encompassed most of the data I was looking at. This process could be described as what Mutch (2005) calls 'perceiving, comparing, contrasting, aggregating, ordering' and 'establishing linkages and relationships'. Having organized and reviewed my first interview data, I then took it to my participants for their thoughts and interpretations, to establish if the concepts I had picked up on were consistent with their views and experiences. I did this as part of my commitment to carry out reciprocal research (Harrison et al., 2001) 'with' participants, rather than 'on' them. I also took my thoughts to my supervisors, who asked me to move beyond 'description' and into 'interrogation' of data, which is when I started applying a culturally responsive lens to my thinking. "Coding here is actually about going beyond the data, thinking creatively with the data, asking the data questions, and generating theories and frameworks" (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 30). The themes that stood out the most, and withstood this interrogation, are about support, teaching and learning practices, acceptance of teen parent identities and expectations of success. Factors around why this was the case became the next stage of analysis, in relation to my research questions.

I spent some time looking at the second interview data, thinking about participant observations I had carried out, looking at fieldnote data and document analysis in relation to my existing codes, new codes, categories, concepts and other literature. I looked at Teen Parent Unit literature in New Zealand, and New Zealand situated studies exploring culturally responsive pedagogies as their theoretical framework. At this point in my research journey, the Christchurch earthquake of the 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2011 took place. This event brought an entire city to its knees. Needless to say, my family and I were also affected by it. In April of

2011, we left Christchurch for another New Zealand city. My personal disruption meant that I did not consult my participants in the way I would have liked, about the second interview, subsequent observation and fieldnote data. I was distracted, busy with a move, and largely made contact with them by text message. I feel that I did not maintain my commitment to a reciprocal process of data analysis with the second set of interview data. Regardless, several months later the same process outlined above was followed, and my supervisors suggested I follow writing as a method of inquiry (Richardson & Adams St. Pierre, 2000).

### **Re/Presentation of findings**

“Writing is part of the interpretive process through which the theoretical implications of data collection and analysis are worked out more fully, though never completely” (Ezzy, 2002, p. 138). I have attempted, in this thesis, to engage in ‘impressionist’ writing (Ezzy, 2002), using my experience of the research process and my lens as a researcher to portray the perspectives of a group of pregnant and parenting teens attending one Teen Parent Unit in an urban setting in New Zealand. In doing so I acknowledge that:

The potential for researchers to exploit and objectify—to Other—has been clearly articulated within the discourses of postpositivism.... As feminist researchers, we strive to avoid Othering yet are compelled by the nature of our work, the constraints of the institutions we inhabit, and the requirements of academic publishing to construct research projects in certain ways and produce certain types of texts as we talk among ourselves about other people’s lives (Harrison et al., 2001, p.341).

When I started this project I was quite sure that I was not interested in feminist research. Critical inquiry was not for me, feminist approaches were too ‘militant’, and my belief system was based upon ‘equality’. As time went by and I designed my questions, read literature in my field and started to read about this framework, I suddenly noticed that, to an extent, I have engaged with critical inquiry. I am a female researcher working with four female participants at a school whose pupils are all female and whose permanent staff, bar one, are female. My evolving research question relates to the way society and academia (largely in the field of quantitative research) - those in a position of power, the ‘Us’ (Harrison et al., 2001) - have positioned teenage parents as the ‘Other’ (ibid.). It is more concerned with the ways a school for pregnant and parenting teens has reframed this positioning.

It is a criterion of trustworthiness in feminist qualitative research that attention is paid to the emotional aspects of the research. The re/presentation of participants in feminist qualitative research is recognized as one of the principal areas of power imbalance in the research relationship (ibid, p.326).

I have attempted in my qualitative research journey to re/present young parents as students, parents, young people with skills, aptitudes, goals, hopes, dreams and achievements, in a non-patronising and honest way. This has been attempted through the gathering and analyzing of thick, rich, descriptive data, using the participants' perspectives, as analysed through my lens, with the intention of enlightening readers about the possibilities offered by schools for teen parents (Stark & Torrance, 2005). I feel a strong commitment to using the words of the participants in this research where possible, to honouring their thoughts, experiences and analysis, rather than 'just' writing a piece of academic work. I would like this thesis to be at least somewhat accessible to a large pool of people, from pregnant and parenting teens, to those working with them, those writing policy affecting them and those conducting research with and 'on' them. My use of participants' words attempts to respect the following ethical commitment:

Displaying segments of primary texts in research reports makes the primary data on which the analysis is built available to other researchers. Other researchers are then able to assess the trustworthiness of the interpretations of these data made by the analyst (Ezzy, 2002, p. 147).

I cannot say that I have succeeded in addressing the researcher/research participant 'power imbalance' referred to by Harrison et al., (2001) but I have been conscious of it throughout the research process.

### **Trustworthiness, credibility and ethical considerations**

At the beginning of this project I was familiar with a small pool of research that looked at teenage pregnancy in Aotearoa/New Zealand. I believed that all teen parent educators could benefit from the teaching and learning practices operating at Unity College. I realized that I could not study all of the Teen Parent Units in New Zealand and the differences in their practices; instead I could look at the ways Unity College reframed and supported its students' success. It is my hope that "...readers recognize aspects of their own experience in the case

and intuitively generalize from the case, rather than the sample (of one) being statistically representative of the population as a whole” (Stark & Torrance, 2005, p. 34). I have attempted to represent findings in a way that resonates with readers and their settings, rather than seeking to make ‘generalizable’ conclusions (Bell, 1993; Mutch, 2005; Stark & Torrance, 2005; Burgess et al., 2006). I have provided rich description of the setting, conducted repeated interviews with participants, utilized more than one source of data collection and have tried to avoid going with first impressions or deeply held beliefs at the start of the study. Burgess et al., state: “Collecting data through different methods is important as it will help you to verify which data is relevant and worthwhile and strengthen your data analysis” (2006, p. 71).

### Ethics

In order to maintain a commitment to doing no harm (Tolich & Davidson, 1999; Cram, 2001; Harrison et al., 2001; Mutch, 2005; Burgess et al., 2006), I have operated with openness and honesty in my interactions with research participants and the Teen Parent Unit as a whole. I have attempted at every turn to maintain my personal integrity and respect for people and place. I gained ethical approval from the University of Canterbury Ethics Committee for the project before undertaking this research, gained the informed consent of all participants, *see Appendix D* established the boundaries of voluntary participation - I have not included several excerpts which participants asked to be removed from transcribed interviews - and had input from my supervisors, friends and peers, as a further check and balance.

### Maintaining TPU and participant confidentiality

This has been my biggest ethical struggle to date. New Zealand is a small country (Tolich & Davidson, 1999). There are nineteen Teen Parent Units in Aotearoa, and I have a relationship with a particular TPU through one of my parents. That parent is known in the field of teen parent education, which makes anonymity near impossible. The Director of Unity College, staff and participants were made aware of this challenge early on in the research. I talked through what this could mean before conducting interviews. As such, I have endeavoured to maintain confidentiality, rather than anonymity. Staff at Unity College and most students are aware of the four participants in this research project. The first four interviews were held onsite at the TPU for the comfort of participants. The intimacy of the school means that staff may be able to distinguish which participant has been quoted, should they choose to read this thesis. I have grown to feel comfortable with this on the basis that students’ biographies, their

personal histories, their transformations, strengths and weaknesses are known by staff and students alike at Unity College. Biographies of transformation are one aspect of speeches given by students at the school's public end of year Prize Giving (Participant observation, 25/11/2010). One of my participants, Jane, made a speech in the 2010 Prize Giving that highlights her educational and personal experiences that are also included in this thesis. Her comfort in doing so alleviated my discomfort at the possibility that she could be identified by this work. In spite of this, I have used pseudonyms, changed identifying characteristics of participants (Middleton, 1993), and attempted to honour confidentiality in my writing, as this was my commitment at the start of this project. If participants are able to be identified by 'insiders', they should not be identifiable to 'outsiders'.

### Collaboration

I had such high ideals when I started this project, I was going to be involved in collaborative research, participants would be involved in every stage of data analysis, this would be a collective piece of work which could benefit me (I would hopefully achieve a Master in Education degree), the participants, and potentially all teen parents engaged in education at a Teen Parent Unit. I was a supporter of teen parent education, this could be a positive piece of research which challenged deficit constructions of teenaged pregnancy and parenting, everything was looking rosy.

In reality I have faced several practical and ideological challenges in the course of my research journey. Firstly, I hoped that thematic analysis would initially be undertaken by me, using my own perceptions, looking at themes that stood out, any repeated ideas, and any ideas that were in stark contrast with other thoughts and views. These would be categorized, coded and organized. Once that had taken place, I would talk to the participants to ensure that the concepts I had identified in my findings resonated with them in that what I wrote was true to their thoughts, while relating to the thoughts of respected researchers or specialists working in the field. I thought that rather than me solely representing participants, they could also represent themselves (Mutch, 2005)!

I failed to take into consideration the reality that I chose to dedicate a period of my life to completing a degree which involves conducting this research. The participants did not make that decision. At the outset of data collection, I did not think I would be transcribing interviews which ended up being 34 pages long – that is an unwieldy document to email to somebody, and it is a long document to read. It requires a time commitment in the face of

parenting, homework, housework, a social life, good television, the list goes on. Thorough, collaborative data analysis quickly became brief chats, text messages and catch ups, rather than detailed examination of written data.

In my research proposal I said:

Reciprocity will be a key feature of my trustworthiness (Harrison et al., 2001), and will allow my participants to check my writing and ensure that any thematic analysis holds true to the sentiment of the original conversation or material. This protects me as a researcher, and my participants; it prevents me from putting words into their mouths. It also allows for some “giving back” (Harrison et al., 2001), but more than that it allows for a more genuine collaboration between my participants and myself (Hindin-Miller, 2009).

I believe I have done my best to stay true to this sentiment, although varied circumstances have challenged the way I imagined this might happen. The participants in this research were not interested in reading lengthy academic documents, written in language which suits post-graduate studies, but not the life and experiences of busy teenagers studying for their high school qualifications while pregnant or parenting. The term ‘culturally responsive practice’ meant very little to my participants, and we discussed the theory around this research in limited and creative ways. While participants have been happy to chat with me at any stage of the research, it has been clear and evident that they found theorising boring and irrelevant. Needless to say, my ideas around collaboration - who is doing the ‘work’, have changed.

As mentioned above, I was involved in a major earthquake and a multitude of subsequent aftershocks, which resulted in my family leaving our home, and Christchurch. My contact with participants was challenged by my personal circumstances, and has been limited to text message and Facebook during the writing stage of this thesis. Where I had such great intentions, the reality of a co-constructed document has not eventuated. Had circumstances been different, I think I would have been naïve to imagine that my participants would be interested in the type of academic theorising I have had to engage in, to meet the requirements of a postgraduate qualification. As one participant said, when confronted with a lengthy academic document I had produced, “Are you happy with it? Then so am I” (Lucy, personal communication, February 2, 2011).

## Cultural safety

In conducting this project I undertook to ‘do no harm’ in the process of my research. To protect the cultural safety of the two participants who identify as a different culture to me, New Zealand Māori, I invited them and all other participants to have a support person with them in the interview process. One participant took up that offer. I also committed to consulting friends and colleagues for a Māori perspective, to keep my thinking ‘honest’. My supervisors were also tasked with this role. I have intentionally not conducted research that could be seen as Kaupapa Māori research, however I was not willing to exclude participants’ rich experiences on the basis of race. That seemed entirely counter-productive. Instead I have challenged myself to remember that my “...point of view of Māori is filtered through [my] own values, circumstances, research training, privilege” (Cram, as cited in Collins, 2005, p. 101). Where possible I have used the process of ‘reciprocity’ and collaboration, sharing my thoughts, theories and writing with participants, to ‘keep me honest’.

## **My lens as a researcher**

As I have mentioned, my parent created this Teen Parent Unit, and accordingly I have had a fifteen year relationship with the school. I have grown up with Unity College and been a long-time supporter of its work and kaupapa (goals). A number of the current teachers have been employed for a long time, and have personally known me through my high school years and beyond. I have occasionally assisted teachers by tutoring their students, and have spent weekends participating in Outdoor Adventure activities, as an adult supporter and driver. When I have done so, teachers and students have always been aware of my parentage. This has affected the areas of trustworthiness and reciprocity, regarding my positioning in relationship to the participants (Harrison et al., 2001). In some ways my research has been assisted by this, as my relationships gave me access to the school, and to participants. My acceptance as a ‘safe’ community member meant that I have been able to have open, sometimes surprisingly intimate conversations, because reciprocity is already ingrained in these relationships.

Unity College has supported me because of my parentage, while hoping that I am writing a positive piece of research about their school practices. To an extent then, I have been an ‘insider’ (Harrison et al., 2001; Burgess et al., 2006) in this research process. In terms of trustworthiness, this could present a conflict. I have aimed to honestly interrogate the culture of success, and not overlook areas that might be uncomfortable, or hard. My bias for the

school may have meant that I have overlooked areas that challenge such a culture, or that I have looked at the positive aspects of practice, in spite of difficulties. It could also mean that my longstanding beliefs about the school have crept into this research, against my attempts to interrogate data for what it says. I have endeavoured to let data speak to me, while balancing my responses and interpretations with what literature in the field of Teen Parent Education, social constructionist theory and culturally responsive pedagogies offer. I hope that what I have written is fair and credible, regardless of whether it is favourable or critical.

In the following chapters, 3 and 4, I have consciously chosen to incorporate literature which looks at education through a Māori lens, or with a Māori world view in mind. I reference the Te Kotahitanga project (Bishop 2003, 2007; Bishop et al., 2009; Bishop et al., 2010; Meyer et al., 2010), which looks at the success of Māori students in school when their ‘contexts’, culture and turangawaewae (the place they stand) are taken into account. I also look at work by Professor Angus Macfarlane, who has reworked culturally responsive pedagogical theory within an indigenous New Zealand context. Finally I draw on the holistic model of health and wellbeing created by Professor Sir Mason Durie (1994), which looks at the importance of viewing people as whole beings, rather than looking at one aspect of a life in isolation from the whole. I have chosen this framework as it most comfortably fits with my experience of what goes on at Unity College, how teaching and learning are done, and the ways staff and students interact.

Chapter 3 considers manaakitanga, or an ethos of care and how this relates to the ways Unity College supports its students and accepts them for who they are and what they ‘bring’ with them to school. I look at a culture of belonging and the elimination of barriers that prevent pregnant and parenting teens from accessing school. Practical supports are highlighted, which remove these barriers. I then move into looking at the ways Unity College has created a school culture of operating as a community/whānau. I explore the relationship between staffing roles and the school community and how this community supports the young parents in acting out their different identities at Unity College, in light of New Zealand based culturally responsive practice and the Whare Tapa Whā (Durie 1994) model.



### **Chapter 3 – An environment that operates to support pregnant and parenting teens**

“You have to be somewhere where you’re accepted to be happy, be positive and succeed” (Jane, 19, Interview 2, 21/12/2010).

In these two data chapters, I consider the ways pregnant and parenting teens understand and negotiate teaching and learning at Unity College. I also explore how new meanings of success are co-constructed and interpreted in the Teen Parent Unit setting. In this first chapter I look at some context to the above. This includes the importance student participants place on feeling supported and accepted in their identity roles while studying at Unity College. Jane’s quote talks to the significance of acceptance of young parents’ identities as a precursor to success. The combination of acceptance and support can otherwise be termed ‘manaakitanga’, or, an ethos of care (Bishop, 2003, 2007; Macfarlane et al., 2007), and relates to a ‘culture of belonging’. I go on to consider the ways Unity College has worked to eliminate “...verified barriers to learning in a school situation [that] have resulted from pregnancy and child-rearing responsibilities” (Ministry of Education, 2011). From there I explore Unity College as a school community/whānau that works to support its students in their various identity roles. I consider how the community, or whānau that has been developed, works as a protective factor against some of the negative stereotypes of pregnant and parenting teens, and encourages students of all backgrounds and experiences to strive and achieve.

#### **Manaakitanga – an ethos of care**

Having a child can present an opportunity for young parents to engage in schooling, rather than ending a teenager’s formal educational journey. All the parenting teens interviewed at Unity College described wanting “to push myself and come back here and get a good life for me, and my [child]” (Jane, 19, Interview 1, 11/11/10). The role of ‘parent’ provided the motivation to improve their circumstances and their level of education in order to go on and ‘do something’ with their lives. The pregnant participant found a renewed interest in her schooling because of becoming pregnant and being exposed to “... a second chance at education” (Shelley, 14, Interview 1, 18/11/10).

Staff at Unity College worked to capitalise on this renewed interest by creating an environment which engaged their students and supported their learning, while expecting them to work hard and achieve to their ability. Some Kaupapa Māori and New Zealand-situated culturally responsive theories talk about the significance of creating a place where students belong, where it is ‘safe’ to be themselves, where student thoughts and feelings are valued (Bishop, 2003, 2007; Macfarlane et al., 2007; Bishop et al., 2009). From this platform teaching and learning relationships can be developed that enable students to strive and to achieve.

Aspects of what makes a learning community or whānau successful are ‘manaakitanga’, which can otherwise be termed an ethos of care (Macfarlane et al., 2007; Bishop et al., 2009); ‘kotahitanga’, which relates to unity and belonging (Macfarlane et al., 2007); and ‘whānaungatanga’ (Macfarlane et al., 2007; Bishop et al., 2010), which is the building of relationships based on trust and respect. One of the aims of culturally responsive pedagogies (CRP), with its strong socio-cultural perspective on teaching and learning is that context matters – that creating a culture, or climate, of belonging is an important aspect of pedagogy. CRP are theoretically based pedagogical practices. They consider that when certain conditions are met, such as a culture of belonging, students are in a position to succeed.

### **Support and acceptance of students, and a culture of belonging**

The first theme to emerge from my analysis of the interview data with participants was the significance they placed on the unconditional support they received at Unity College. One crucial aspect of the support students experienced was the uniquely accepting attitude of staff towards teenage pregnancy. This was a standout feature of all participant interviews and contributed to the strong bonds of loyalty students had for their school. This relates to the concepts of kotahitanga and whānaungatanga (Macfarlane et al., 2007; Bishop, et al., 2010) outlined above. It also relates to culturally responsive requisites for success, where teachers need to understand and respect their students for who they are and what they bring to the teacher/student relationship. For Chelsea, acceptance of her identity role as a teen parent was critical to her desire to engage and attend school. “[They’re just] a good bunch of teachers who aren’t judgemental, like don’t look at you like, ‘oh my God, you’re a teenager, you’ve got a daughter, oh my gosh’, you know?” (19, Interview 1, 09/11/10).

To put staff acceptance of teen pregnancy in context, participants talked to their experiences of being a teen parent outside a TPU environment. This discussion involved the ways young parents are portrayed in the news and media, the personal experience of participants when out and about with their children, and the response of family and friends to the news of their pregnancy. The combined experiences were often disheartening. The pregnant and parenting teens were exposed to judgement from strangers when going about normal daily activities, such as a trip to the mall:

And you walk around and you notice people give you these looks, specially when I was pregnant... but the older generation especially would always look at you like, 'oh my gosh, What have you got yourself into'.... Like last week we went to the mall and there was three of us with our children in our prams and everyone looks at you like, 'oh my gosh, there's a group of them', you know (Chelsea, 19, Interview 1, 09/11/10).

This level of criticism and judgement from complete strangers could impact the confidence pregnant and parenting teens had in their identity role as parents. Jane talked to the response of her grandparents to the news of her pregnancy: "Silly thing, naughty children having children', that's what my nana said, 'you're a child, you're a baby having a baby'. And I may have been a baby then, but I'm definitely not a baby now" (19, Interview 1, 11/11/10).

Unsurprisingly participants valued feeling safe in themselves while at the TPU. In the context of their negative experiences, Unity College provided a haven of acceptance and positivity about teen pregnancy and parenting. All participants identified the role staff played in not only accepting that students were young parents, but being excited about their roles as parents as well. It was this acceptance which contributed to students' desire to be enrolled at Unity College, and willingness to engage there. Without it, participants could not imagine continuing to attend the TPU or manage their workloads. Jane spoke to the importance of this acceptance: "It's everything! How can you continue in an environment where you want to succeed when they can't accept you...? You have to be somewhere where you're accepted to be happy, be positive and succeed" (19, Interview 2, 21/12/10). Jane's sentiment echoes New Zealand culturally responsive pedagogical theory. In the context of Māori student achievement, acceptance of students as culturally situated beings, or valuing students' Māori identity, is a vital precursor to engaging in a teaching and learning relationship (Bishop, 2003, 2007, Macfarlane et al., 2007; Bishop et al., 2009; Bishop et al., 2010; Meyer et al.,

2010). From a base of genuine acceptance, Unity College staff are able to work alongside pregnant and parenting teens, in many, if not all, of their identity roles. This accompaniment is part of an environment that operates to enable students to feel successful.

### **Support in a practical sense**

Teen Parent Units are working with the educational and, increasingly, social support needs of young people who are often described as ‘vulnerable’ students (Baragwanath, 1998). Pregnant and parenting teens face barriers to their education that are not relevant to other groups of students, such as childcare, child health, or the ability to organise and transport themselves and their child/ren. Financial realities can be very different to those of the ‘average’ New Zealand student; there is no guarantee that a pregnant or parenting teen is being supported by their parent/s or family. Unity College has developed an environment which operates to remove barriers to pregnant and parenting teens accessing education, child care and social support. One aspect of this environment is looking at practical realities and turning barriers to accessing education into seamless and positive, engaging experiences. This falls under the banner of manaakitanga (Bishop 2007; Macfarlane et al., 2007), or an ethos of care, and contributes to a culture of belonging.

### Transport

Unity College recognised that many of its students found access to school a barrier. One element of access was the physical ability of students to get themselves and their children organised and to school. Getting up, showering, organising herself and her child/ren, packing lunches, nappies and changes of clothes to be ready and out the door can be a huge task for any parent. Unity College supports its students by showing them that they care so much they will bring school to the students. Vans go out in the morning on a schedule from 7:15am and pick up any student and their children who need transport. “[Transport means students] can get here, and bring their children in, and still study, rather than being stuck at home” (19, Chelsea, Interview 1, 09/11/10). Once school has finished, the vans go back out again for up to two hours, dropping students and their children home. Besides making school accessible, this contributes to the forming of friendships, of daily routines for mothers and children, as well as letting students know that their school wants them to attend. All of these are crucial elements of the support this TPU offers to its students. When asked about the practical aspects of daily life which make Unity College work, Jane answered: “Vans. Because a lot of

these girls would not be able to come into this school without these vans” (19, Interview 11/11/10).

### Work and Income assistance

Work and Income support is another crucial area which makes it less challenging for young parents to access school. There are a variety of benefits or allowances which pregnant and parenting students may be entitled to, some of which fund vital services at Unity College. The Early Learning Centre is partially funded by Work and Income subsidies; course fees, material costs, travel costs and childcare costs, NCEA fees and transport for students coming to school in the vans are financed by the Training Incentive Allowance. This is a complicated system, and without support and a point of contact, organising students’ entitlements and ensuring that funding was allocated correctly could be, and historically was, (Hindin-Miller, 2011, personal communication) a barrier to schooling.

Enrolment of new and returning students at Unity College has become a well-honed process. The Early Learning Centre Manager and a Work and Income Case Worker, who has been assigned to the school, sit together and work through all the lengthy and complicated paperwork with students. Application forms are filled out and then processed by the Work and Income employee, who ensures everything is completed and all relevant identification is verified at school (Participant observation, 01/02/2011). There is one point of contact with Work and Income, she visits the school fortnightly and advocates for the young parents. She also follows up if there are any issues around entitlements or benefits. This same woman has been the point of contact for Unity College for more than five years. She is a known face and she is trusted by staff and students alike because of her relationship with the school. When asked what makes Unity College work, Lucy identified the role Work and Income played in making school accessible: “Work and Income. They come here to see what we want” (19, Interview 1, 11/11/10). This is in stark contrast to the experiences of young parents when having to advocate for themselves at Work and Income offices. The College Case Manager is so helpful, that when I was completing my participant observation, she helped me fill in my own Childcare Subsidy form and took it away to process for me (Fieldnote, 01/02/11).

Before there was a Case Worker assigned to the school, young parents found that they had difficulty accessing their entitlements. There were also inconsistencies in what young parents with the same circumstances were allocated, and told they were entitled to. Some were given

funding for all of their entitlements, others had to fight to have their basic needs met. This affected the running of the Childcare Centre and the vans and was a considerable barrier to pregnant and parenting teens accessing education. Unity College recognised the merits of supporting its students by making all of the administrative aspects of schooling as easy as possible, to ensure that students are able to focus on their real jobs: as learners and parents. This removal of barriers is a vital precursor to success.

### **The Unity College community/whānau:**

Unity College has created a school culture of operating as a community or whānau. This community/whānau works to help shape and support its ‘girls’ (a term participants used to describe themselves and their peers) as parents, students, teenagers; young people navigating multiple identities every day. New Zealand and Western society largely consider teenage parents in a negative light, as a ‘problem’ (Woodward et al., 2001b; Hallman, 2007; Scholl, 2007). Unity College challenges these negative stereotypes and works with its students to reframe what it means to be a pregnant or parenting teenager. In this section I look at the relationship between staffing roles and the school community. I also consider how this community supports the young parents in acting out their different identities at Unity College, in light of New Zealand based culturally responsive practice and the Whare Tapa Whā (Durie 1994) model.

The community or whānau, that has been developed, works as a protective factor against some of these negative stereotypes of pregnant and parenting teens, and encourages students of all backgrounds and experiences to strive and achieve. This is consistent with other New Zealand based culturally responsive pedagogical experience (Bishop, 2003, 2007; Macfarlane 2004; Bishop et al., 2009; Bishop et al., 2010; Meyer et al., 2010). When asked about previous high school experiences compared with current experiences, all participants talked of the importance of being part of a community, and all spoke of the way the TPU encouraged and celebrated success. As Jane put it: “It’s a community, like, you feel like a family. And when you feel like a family... you work as a family” (19, Interview 2, 16/12/2010).

### **Creating a community**

The Unity College school community was developed in a number of ways. Teachers, the receptionist, the Early Learning Centre, (ELC) the support worker and students all played

their part in putting the heart, the pumanawatanga (Macfarlane et al., 2007) into Unity College. All of the participants described feeling anxious about re-engaging in education in a new environment, but found that “...everyone was very welcoming, talked to me when I needed help and I wasn’t isolated from anyone which was really good” (Chelsea, 19, Interview 1, 09/11/2010). Staff modelled the behaviours they wanted to characterise interactions at their school, such as showing hospitality. “[All the staff] welcome you in, in the mornings and say goodbye when they’re leaving and stuff. And if you have any troubles they try and help you out as best they can” (Shelley, 14, Interview 1, 18/11/2010).

The idea of caring for students beyond the classroom assisted the young mums and engaged them, taking relationships beyond typical ‘teacher/student’ interactions to a feeling of community/whānau. This emphasis on relationships is apparent when one visits the College, and characterises peer friendships, dealings between students and their own/peers’ children, and staff-student interactions (Fieldnote, 11/10/2010). The idea of a school community, or whānau, is common to all the students at the school, who take pride in having a place that is ‘theirs’, where they belong. Sentiments such as Jane’s are common: “Even though it’s a school, it still feels like a community... a family... we’re all like sisters here” (19, Interview 1, 11/11/2010). The strength of these relationships and the school whānau are examples of the culturally responsive ideals of strong support and relationships, criteria on which success can be built. Both of these factors contribute to the co-construction of success.

Unity College has built roles around the needs of the students; the community has been specifically developed with a holistic model such as Whare Tapa Whā (Durie 1994) in mind, to cater to all the unique needs of pregnant and parenting students. Students’ physical, emotional/intellectual, whānau/community or relational, and spiritual sides all have their place at Unity College. The different staff members play different roles in building the school community, and the community would not function as well without the various roles. The idea of accompaniment is a core aspect of staff practice; staff members walk alongside students in the various aspects of their lives, sharing lived experiences and creating new ones. This contributes to the negotiation of teaching and learning. All the participants talked about their appreciation for being able to be all of who they are at Unity College, rather than ‘just’ being students while attending the school. In having a place where it is safe to be themselves (Bishop et al., 2009; Bishop et al., 2010; Meyer et al., 2010), space is created to support students to strive for excellence in any and all of their identity roles. This accompaniment is

crucial to the co-construction of success. Whether that success is academic, social, as a parent, or takes any of a number of other forms, accompaniment of at least one staff member or fellow student provides vital assistance.

### The role of teachers in the school community

Teachers are often the students' first point of contact with Unity College. Students meet with the Director, who is also a classroom teacher, before they have any other contact with the school, and if they start at the beginning of the school year, meet all of the teaching staff on enrolment day. Typical high school formalities are soon waived, for example teachers and students address each other by their first names. This was considered a significant factor by all four participants, who appreciated this small aspect of rapport building as an indicator of staff attitudes towards students, and of every person standing on equal footing, or kotahitanga, (Macfarlane et al., 2007; Bishop et al., 2009) at Unity College. It can also be seen as an acknowledgement that while students are teenagers, they are also adults, acting out adult roles as parents every day.

Yeah it's just, not so formal, not so uptight, you know, it's just chilled, relaxed, you know. You get to know them as persons [sic] as well.... When you meet teachers at high schools you know them as their last names, that means you only know them as teachers. [B]ut at [Unity College] you know them as people, they talk about their family, you know, you really have a friendship with them. And that's good (Jane, 19, Interview 2, 16/12/2010).

The Unity College classroom operates in different ways to a traditional high school classroom. At the start of the school year staff and students go on a journey together to get to know each other. Every morning when school starts, after children have been settled in childcare, a karakia is said by all staff and students in the classroom. This is followed by a morning starter, run by the teachers, in the form of a quiz or game, an activity to do with personal relationships, recipe sharing, parenting tips, pregnancy tips and the like. Teachers talk about their family and home lives, and as Jane mentioned in the quote above, they work to develop friendships with the students. Some of the teachers are parenting teenagers, who are studying at the same year level as the Unity College students. The teachers make the time to develop the school community/whānau by learning and sharing these things about each other. Both students and teachers value the relationships that develop. Building strong



relationships with students is part of the culturally responsive criteria for academic success. It also helps balance out power relationships, providing a space for teen parents to contribute to teaching and learning.

The use of first names can be seen as one small example of what Bishop et al. term ‘power-sharing’ (2009). They go on to say: “It is our position that positive, inclusive relationships and interactions will lead to improved student engagement in learning” (ibid, p. 736). Teachers at Unity College are tasked with several roles. They are responsible for the teaching and learning interactions they are involved with, they reflect on where each student is tracking in terms of their educational goals and they also have the task of building loving, genuine relationships with students, creating an environment that is welcoming and inclusive and which contributes to student engagement in the school community and in their education. The participants saw the importance of relationships as a crucial aspect of the teachers’ role in the school community/whānau.

L – Like they’re all really caring and they just want to see us excel and succeed. J – They always have the time to listen to us as well. They always have the time, if we’re... struggling, or if we’re having a bad day, they’ll always take the time, or if [there’s] exciting news, they always take the time to listen and find out what’s going on. J – Yeah, outside and within school as well (Lucy and Jane, Interview 1, 11/11/2010).

This caring for students, or manaakitanga, reflects teachers’ awareness of the different identities that their students are acting out every day in the classroom. Teachers at Unity College do not expect students to compartmentalise their lives while at school, rather they view their students through a holistic lens, locating them as young people navigating multiple identities at any given time. This may be the most crucial role that teachers play in the school community, accepting and acknowledging the lived realities of their students, and building nurturing relationships with the whole student and their child/ren. From the perspective of the Whare Tapa Whā (Durie 1994) model, teachers see their students as whole people, with taha hinengaro, an intellectual life, taha tinana, a physical life, taha wairua, a spiritual/social life and taha whānau, a family/community life. Further manifestations of this awareness are the acceptance of classroom conversations about life outside of school. In the second round of interviews, all participants were asked about the way Unity College dealt with a variety of difficult personal situations. The responses that came through showed that teachers play a

role in guiding both the academic and personal/social lives of their students. "...[E]very now and again people have boy problems and everyone would find out about them and we'd all just talk about it really. In the classroom, yeah, all together" (Chelsea, 19, Interview 2, 21/12/2010).

If students have issues or situations to deal with in their personal lives, teachers created a space for that conversation to take place in the classroom, acknowledging that life outside of school affects the lives of students at school. This creates a sense of community learning, and allowed students to deal with each other more sensitively if they knew someone was struggling. Lucy talked to this point too:

...we've got like more, just open space [than other schools] and... we all talk, like we have class meetings and we want to know what each other's up to and stuff. So it just, just makes things easier.... [Unity College]'s just more open to talk... to find out more about you and what you need and what you want to achieve in life (19, Interview 2, 16/12/2010).

This openness and desire to know what students want to achieve in life is crucial. If staff 'really know' their pregnant and parenting charges, they are able to create an environment that can contribute to their success. Developing an awareness of hopes, dreams and aspirations allows staff to assist in building pathways to student achievement of their goals.

Another aspect of relationships becomes evident when situations arise involving conflict between students. Teachers play a role in mediating and ensuring harmony in the community, rather than ignoring issues or behaviour managing students as might be the case in a traditional high school classroom.

...like there are some students that are really pushy and they really get on other girls' nerves... but the teachers know what they're like and they deal with each individual [based] on how they react and... they really get to settle them down you know... there's no one really unsatisfied sort of thing, you know. If there's a problem they don't put you all together and just yell at you, they just separate you, talk to you each individually, and they know how you work. I don't know how the hell they know how you work, but they know how you work (Jane, 19, Interview 2, 16/12/2010).

Knowing how students ‘work’ is a direct outcome of staff taking the time to develop relationships with the young parents. It is evidence of the ‘space’ Lucy referred to that was created for ‘talk’. It also positions teachers more strongly when conflict and challenges arise. Pregnant and parenting teens have been classified as a ‘high risk’ group within education, for many of the reasons highlighted at various points throughout this thesis. Because of life factors resulting from the interplay of their various identity roles, issues can arise in a TPU classroom more frequently than in ‘mainstream’ classrooms. The ability of teachers to defuse these situations is part of the environment Unity College has created, which works to allow students to feel successful, where in a different context the same behaviour might result in a student being stood down.

### The role of the ELC in the school community

While students meet the Director before they have any other contact with the school, all students are encouraged to spend time in the ELC while they are settling in to their new environments and routines. This often means that childcare provides the first real opportunity to engage with other students, and can set the tone for staff-student interactions. The ELC is staffed by 7 employees, all of whom are female. There are two relief teachers, one of whom is male. Having a male teacher is fairly uncommon in an ELC setting. Staff range from late 20s to over 50, and are largely Pākehā, with one Māori teacher. The Centre operates in three languages, English, Māori and Samoan, as one of the teachers is married to a Samoan man and has lived in Samoa and raised Samoan speaking children. One of the ELC teachers is wheelchair bound (Fieldnote, 01/01/11). The diversity of gender, language and physical ability sets this Centre apart from many others, and models acceptance that anyone can be who they are at Unity College, regardless of ability or disability, ethnic or cultural identity and more. All staff are accepted and valued, and all staff operate with love and respect for the young parents and their children (Participant observations 11/10/2010, 25/11/2010, 31/01/2011). In respect to the Whare Tapa Whā model, the ELC caters to the physical, emotional, spiritual and community/whānau needs of the students’ children. “The childcare staff are fantastic.... [T]hey don’t push you, like they give you the space you need with your children... yeah, it’s about you and your child” (Chelsea, 19, Interview 1, 09/11/2010).

Participants spoke of the importance of childcare in allowing them to settle into Unity College and find their place, as the ELC often provided an opportunity for students to

introduce themselves to other parents and develop friendships before they formally entered the classroom:

...[I]t wasn't so bad because there was a whole group of new people coming in, and we all... went into childcare a couple of days before school actually started, and we, you know, got talking and started to know each other, so we kinda knew each other before we went in, were around previous students (Jane, 19, Interview 1, 11/11/2010).

The ELC also provides a space to show young parents how some aspects of the school culture are 'done' before they are immersed in the classroom environment. For those young parents unfamiliar with Māori or Samoan culture, there is a space to learn karakia and prayer, which are a daily aspect of both children's and parents' lives at Unity College. The ways people talk with each other, language that is acceptable or not, is modelled in childcare, allowing students to 'know the ropes' before they are in the more formal classroom environment, with a larger group of students and staff. Staff model constructive conversations with children when they are misbehaving, showing by their example ways of defusing situations or adjusting behaviour (Participant observation, 25/11/2010). This ability to familiarise oneself with the culture of Unity College offers great reassurance to students who can otherwise be nervous about fitting in to a new environment. Role modelling can also encourage parents to try new ways of communicating with their children, teaching valuable parenting skills.

For parenting students, their experience of childcare helped them and their children settle in and adjust to a new routine quickly; young parents are able to access their children at any time, to breastfeed, parent, give them cuddles and comfort; they are not removed from their child for the day. They are also expected to feed their children on breaks for morning and afternoon tea, and lunch. On Thursdays, parents and children do activities together, "[We] have our classes, we spend time with our children" (Chelsea, 19, Interview 1, 09/11/2010). Acknowledging students as parents is standard practice at Unity College; no parent would be denied access to their child, regardless of study requirements. While this is important to all students, it is vital to new parents, who on top of nursing are learning about their child and their role as parents, often for the first time. The ELC provides a space where students can learn about their children's new developments and milestones, age appropriate play, age appropriate books and toys, and appreciate the little things their children are learning and doing every day.

Childcare provides the first opportunity for Unity College to really encourage and help shape students as parents. Having the ELC onsite is a physical acknowledgement that the young people attending Unity College are parents as much as they are teenagers and high school students. Students valued the way childcare staff provided positive feedback about their children and their parenting, which made them more enthusiastic about their parenting role.

Childcare's always telling us, you know, what our children are up to, how to improve it, or What they're doing great. Cos you know they say for children you're supposed to give them more positive things. But they give us lots of positive things about our children, so we feel good, that we're doing good things. And that's the key, I reckon that's the key thing, yeah" (Jane, 19, Interview 1, 11/11/2010).

Participants also expressed their appreciation for the gentle approach that ELC staff took in encouraging them to make different or 'better' choices, in regard to parenting. A simple example is the standard of food which is accepted in the ELC. There is a non-negotiable rule that there are no fast food takeaways for children, and parents are encouraged to make healthy choices with fresh food rather than packaged goods.

J - But like they're always telling us... cos we bring our [kids] lunches in, oh lunch box checks you know, 'that's good', 'that's, oh you shouldn't really bring that in' ra ra, but they never, really say, 'No, you're not having that', you know. But they, sort of, they never really tell you what to do here... they just sort of... J + L *in unison* - Push you that way J – Or that way, and then you've really gotta make the decision by yourself.... That's the good thing (Jane & Lucy, 19, Interview 1, 11/11/2010).

This support and encouragement is a core aspect of students feeling welcome and accepted as parents at Unity College, and the acknowledgement of their autonomy and right to make their own decisions for their children is greatly appreciated. The level of respect staff and students have for each other is quite evident when one visits the school; while there are jokes and banter, there is also appreciation and gratitude, and a fierce protectiveness of their school environment.

In visiting childcare one can immediately see the love that staff have for the children, and the love/adoration that children have for staff (Participant observation 11/10/2010, 25/11/2010, 02/02/2011). The modelling of such loving relationships assists young parents as parents; they see behaviours that they may want to emulate, and as students, it creates the space for academic work to be done. One of the ELC's real strengths is its acknowledgement of students as independent adults, as parents, and this acknowledgement changes the balance of power found in a 'typical' school environment. It also assists the young parents to learn how to succeed in their parenting roles.

### The role of the support worker and the receptionist in the school community

The young people attending Unity College are young parents, or parents-to-be, and students, while also being teenagers who are part of the world. The support worker and receptionist at Unity College fill the role of encouraging and supporting students as teenagers, as financially responsible adults, as partners, wives and girlfriends, as children themselves. These two roles deal with supporting students' lives outside of their immediate school context, and contribute to the holistic support Unity College offers its students. This support often enables students to attend school, or enhances the bond students have with the school, which helps them commit to attending and prioritise school over other aspects of their lives. Having a support worker means that students' lives do not have to be compartmentalised; there is acknowledgement that life affects school and vice versa.

The support worker is the staff member who is the first port of call for students' health needs, although there is a health nurse who visits Unity College weekly and deals with physical health requirements. The receptionist is a trained antenatal educator, and provides antenatal and parenting classes for students at the school, protecting pregnant teens from what are often otherwise negative experiences of antenatal education (Wylie et al., 2009). She is also the welcoming face everyone sees when they arrive at the school building. Students at Unity College are acutely aware that the support worker and receptionist are staff members whose roles are to be there for them. Following the Whare Tapa Whā model, both the receptionist and support worker cater to all sides of a young parent's well-being. They work with physical health needs, emotional and spiritual health needs, and social or community needs. Further, both of these roles also develop relationships with the students' family/whānau.

The support worker is open and approachable, there are no taboos or barriers with her. For example, on the first enrolment day of Term One for new students, the Social Worker amongst many other things talks about contraception with new students. I am not sure whether this is her first meeting with the new students, or if they have met before, but there is no issue made of students being sexually active, quite in contrast with student experiences at other high schools (Fieldnote 02/02/2011). Similarly, confidentiality is stressed when consent forms for the school are being signed, in particular the agreement between students and the Support Worker. From their first interactions, students' privacy is prioritised. This openness and acceptance enables the Support Worker to build quick, strong bonds with the girls. When I asked if participants had a favourite staff member, all of them made mention of the Support Worker. Chelsea's thoughts were echoed by all of the participants: "...our social worker, yeah, she's fantastic. She helps with everything, any problems you have, you can go to her" (Chelsea, 19, Interview 1, 09/11/2010). The participant I interviewed, who had attended the school for only four weeks at the time of our first interview, already had this to say about the Support Worker:

If you need help with money she'll help you. She just helps you out with heaps of different stuff. [I]f you need extra help through WINZ, she'll help you with WINZ. Or like accommodation, she'll help you look. Or like extra help for kids...like getting them into school and stuff (Shelley, 14, Interview 1, 18/11/2010).

This is a crucial aspect of building community, as students are constantly assisted in areas that might otherwise prevent or inhibit them from attending school.

The benefits of having a support worker are manifold. Students are able to address any issues they have in their home or family lives, which are likely to also impact them as students and parents (Paki, 2002; Collins, 2005, 2010; Poelzleitner, 2007; Roxas, 2008; Cubey, 2009; Wylie et al., 2009). This provides the opportunity for support and plans to be put in place to improve students' and their families' quality of life, both within and outside of the school. When given the example of how Unity College works with students who are in violent family situations, one participant said:

...everyone relies a lot on [Support Worker] and [any issues are] not talked about amongst people, we all know it's a safe place, so anything that is talked

about amongst us doesn't leave.... I know they've had a lot to do with Women's Refuge and that sort of stuff and like there's been meetings and all that, like the Women's Refuge are involved, when... [Support Worker] needs to get help that's where she goes (Chelsea, 19, Interview 2, 21/12/2010).

In a participant observation on the day the school's sexual health needs were being formally addressed with students, when STD tests were being conducted, the receptionist was laughing and joking with the students, setting them at ease and comparing a swab to childbirth. She was very comfortably cracking risqué jokes and ensuring there was no tension or taboo around a commonplace health practice (Fieldnote 18/11/2010). This provides another reminder that Unity College creates a school community where it is ok for any student to be all of herself. The receptionist and support worker often have access to these kinds of conversations with students earlier than other staff members, because of the nature of their roles. This level of personal support provides students with evidence that the school wants them to be happy and succeed. In this case, success relates to practices that ensure students are healthy and can then model healthy patterns for their children. The support worker and receptionist work to eliminate any barriers which may prevent their students from engaging in the school community, and the two work as 'aunties' for the young mothers. Both receptionist and social worker also giggle and joke with the young mums, talk openly about anything and everything and offer loving advice along the way. This rapport contributes to the students' love for these two staff members and shows the vital importance of both roles in the school whānau.

### The role of students in the school community

Thus far, I have analysed the role of the staff in the school community. The most important group in the school whānau are the young parents themselves. Their attitudes towards each other, their love and manaakitanga mirror the modelling of the staff members, and act as the glue that keeps the young parents together. Participants talked of the importance of fellowship, of learning together academically, socially, as parents and in life, and of acceptance of each other as significant factors in their school community/whānau. Participants described their joy at being in an environment that enabled them to be students, teenagers, adults, mothers, friends, and in attending a school where everyone else was just like them.



Cos we're all in the same boat, all in the same position, doesn't matter if we, you know, different lifestyles, whatever, different situations, but we all are young, we all have children, and we all, even though we have our times, we all have each other and that's sorta what drew me back [here] (Jane, 19, Interview 1, 11/11/2010).

The knowledge that, regardless of backgrounds and lifestyles, students are active supporters of each other is the biggest attraction of the Unity College school community/whānau. Participants talked of safety in numbers, the idea that being with people in the same situation protected them from societal prejudice and stereotypes, and allowed them to explore their new and developing identity roles. "It feels better [being pregnant here] than just being out in the open. Cos in here you've got like support of everyone else. They've been there and done that" (Shelley, 14, Interview 1, 18/11/2010). Students learn from each other's example and mistakes, and have the opportunity to share challenges and victories in a safe, supportive environment. This enables students to learn new ways of being successful.

Becoming a teenage parent can be an isolating experience. Often one's peer group changes, particularly if a young mother leaves her school environment, and one's social life changes significantly when a young mother begins a parenting role (Collins, 2005; Zachry, 2005; SmithBattle, 2006; Hallman, 2007; Johnson & Denny, 2007; Scholl, 2007; Roxas, 2008; Wylie et al., 2009; Simic, 2010). Non-parenting friends may lack understanding of what is involved in a parenting role, and have unrealistic expectations of on-going social availability. Consequently friendships can drift and young mothers can be left feeling lonely and isolated. A community of peers who are in similar situations fulfils a number of social needs for young mothers. Shared experience, interaction with each other's children, learning about babies' development at various ages and stages, are all part of the young mothers' contribution to the school whānau. "[Students] just tell me about all the exciting things they do with their kids. And so do the teachers. [They let me know that parenting] ...can be easy if you put your mind to it" (Shelley, 14, Interview 1, 18/11/2010). Students fill a role in the school community of sharing life experiences, understanding the realities of navigating multiple identities at any given time, juggling studies, children, relationships and life. Having access to others who understand the challenges associated with these roles and identities is reassuring to the young mothers. The openness and willingness of the students to engage with each other in their various roles is a significant aspect of the students' contribution to the school

community/whānau. It also helps to model success as parents, as teenagers, as students, as partners and more.

For a number of young parents, previous high school experiences were negative, or they did not feel engaged as students in school. At Unity College, young parents play a role in re-engaging each other in their education, by supporting each other's learning, and through the strength of friendships that develop in the school environment. Students spend time together in the mornings being transported to school, in childcare, in the classroom, in the kitchen and the 'vege' garden on breaks, in the community doing a Citizenship programme, and in the vans on the way home from school. In this time, they make an effort to get to know each other and develop deep friendships, while their children also develop strong friendships in the childcare setting. This can be seen as the development of group identity, or 'mana motuhake' (Bishop et al., 2009). Where starting at a new school can be a nerve-wracking experience, participants found the warmth of fellow students, and the emphasis on welcoming new students into the fold, made starting at Unity College an easier task. This hospitality is a key aspect of the students' role in the school community/whānau.

As soon as I walked in the door [student] looked up at me and had this big grin on and just smiled said 'hi'. And then we just became real good mates from then on, so it was good starting. Like, you know what it's like starting a new school, it wasn't as bad (Lucy, 19, Interview 1, 11/11/2010).

From this platform of mana motuhake, (Bishop et al., 2009) students are able to work together in the classroom; those who are at different year levels buddy with newer students, or help out those completing work they did in a previous year.

Yeah, [classmates] help out. Well the older ones... who have already been there and done it, they just give easy ways of doing it. Not telling me how to do it, but showing me easy ways how to. [They] say where are you up to... I've done this, try do it like this, if you can't then try it like this. There's always a way to work it out though (Shelley, 14, Interview 1, 18/11/2010).

Assisting each other as students is another role that young parents fill as part of the Unity College community/whānau. This has a flow on effect to mentoring and the empowerment of younger students in the school. "We talk to one another, we get advice from everyone"

(Chelsea, 19, Interview 1, 09/11/2010). It is the students who let each other know that Unity College is a safe place to be themselves. Peer support and mentoring works to show the youngest students what they might aim for academically and career-wise, and assists in the development of aspirations and goals. Students can see where other students are achieving or making progress, and the career and life direction their own progress might take them in.

Peer support and mentoring is particularly important for the youngest pregnant or parenting students, who can be viewed negatively by mainstream school peers and society at large, for being sexually active.

Well, at [previous High School] if you said you were having sex with someone they'd call you like a slut or something, but at [Unity College] they'd just go, shrugs shoulders, like that. They accept that you're *not* a slut (Shelley, 14, Interview 2, 17/12/2010, original emphasis).

Participants valued being able to share the experience of young parenting, the acceptance that they were or had been sexually active and the ability to talk freely with each other about the realities of sex and sexual activity, including sexual health. This provided a welcome change to experiences in previous, mainstream high schools, where sexual activity was viewed as problematic or deviant. One participant was bullied for being sexually active at her high school, another described not wanting to see the health nurse, for fear her peers would assume she was pregnant or had an STD. Neither of those areas were concerns with peers at Unity College. Participants described having more 'intellectual', mature conversations about sex, safe in the knowledge that "...at [Unity College] we've all had sex, you know we all know what to do... it's no real shock to us" (Jane, 19, Interview 2, 16/12/2010).

Students play the most important role in the school community/whānau. Students create bonds of fellowship, lead by example, offer academic, parenting and social support to one another. From a Whare Tapa Whā (Durie 1994) perspective, they work with each other as whole people, acknowledging all aspects of each others' lives. All of these factors make a significant contribution to the environment at Unity College that works to enable students to feel successful.

In the next chapter, I look at the co-construction of success and successes within the context of the classroom. I look at the ways students understand teaching and learning interactions

and relationships and the idea of a culture of success. I make comparisons between young parents' experiences at Unity College and their former high schools, with a focus on reward and recognition and classroom learning. This is linked to other New Zealand examples of schools engaged in culturally responsive teaching and learning.

## **Chapter 4 – Teaching, learning and second chance education**

“I want Excellence in everything I do because I know I can do it” (Jane, 19, Interview 2, 16/12/2010).

The above quote comes from Jane, who is talking about her personal educational transformation. She went from being a student with drug and alcohol problems, who was ‘rebellious’, suspended and excluded from school, to a student who was motivated, goal focussed and achieving at the highest level. Jane attributes this transformation in part to her personal development, and in part to Unity College, for getting to know her, walking alongside her and showing her that she is more than capable of high level success. In this chapter, I explore some of the approaches Unity College has taken to “...address the need for second chance education...” (Baragwanath, 1998, p. 14) for its young mothers. In doing so, I look at what success can be at Unity College. I look at the role of teachers in encouraging success and creating a space for success, the way students take up the challenge to have autonomy over their learning and their successes, and the way these contribute to a culture of success and the normalisation of striving for success. I make comparisons between students’ previous high school experiences and their experiences at Unity College, with particular regard to reward, recognition, experience of the classroom and success. I continue on to explore the ways academic learning is carried out in the Unity College classroom, in light of other examples of schools engaged in New Zealand situated culturally responsive teaching and learning.

### **What is success?**

In Chapter 1 – Introduction and review of literature, I looked at traditional ideas of school success. These are largely based around academic achievement, which involves completing high school with relevant qualifications. In a Teen Parent Unit context, young people are acting out many more identity roles than just that of student. I have spoken to this in the previous data chapter. Success in this context means quite different things.

In the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007), a policy document for English-medium schools, success is considered more broadly than a rigid academic understanding. The document, speaks to ‘lifelong learners’, ‘energy and creativity’, ‘perseverance’, and the development of skills and attributes that enable young people to live ‘full and satisfying lives’ (p. 8). Of course, the New Zealand Curriculum articulates an ideal

and is not a binding professional code of practice. Reference is made to the ideas espoused in this document, rather than the reality of its implementation across the board in New Zealand schools. Nevertheless, Unity College is attempting to fulfil these broader definitions of success. For example, young parents, who are often classified as ‘high risk’ parents (Schinke, 1998; Fergusson & Woodward, 2000; Woodward et al., 2001a; Woodward et al., 2001b; Amin et al., 2006), can be seen as starting down the path of creating ‘lifelong learners’ (Tyler-Merrick, 2011) through accessing Early Childhood education for their children. Young parents re-engaging in high school education are also modelling the importance of education to the next generation, particularly given a mother’s educational achievements are considered the biggest indicators of a child’s academic achievements (SmithBattle, 2006; Wylie et al., 2008).

Similarly, ‘persevering in the face of difficulties’, another definition of success in the Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007), is a daily reality for many young parents. As has been discussed in previous chapters, young parents are exposed to high levels of judgement and negativity from society, which can affect their sense of identity and expectations of success. Considering perseverance, what Collins (2005; 2010) terms ‘resilience’, allows for a whole range of successes that have not always been acknowledged in a school context. If we look more broadly again, success can also be found in nurturing parents to engage with and value their children. Success could be learning to recognise and celebrate a child’s development. It could include learning how to positively engage with children through their difficult ages and stages (some might argue that they never end). Success might be a teenage parent prioritising their child’s needs over their own, which in itself is a teenage developmental milestone. From a Whare Tapa Whā perspective, these relate to taha whānau – family and relational well-being.

There are a whole raft of successes that relate to developing a strong sense of identity and cultural identity; for example, identifying as Māori or as a teen parent. From a CRP perspective, learning about and valuing Māori identity, as Lucy has in her time at Unity College, forms a platform for a wide variety of future successes (Macfarlane, 2004; Macfarlane et al., 2007; Bishop et al., 2009), and also strengthens resilience. This relates to concepts of taha wairua and taha hinengaro, or spiritual and psychological well-being. I am not attempting to prescribe what success is and is not, rather I am hoping to look beyond

limiting success to strict academic attainment, and instead include a more rounded view of human beings.

In the previous chapter I have given context to the ways Unity College has created an environment that can support its young mums as students, parents, teenagers, young people navigating multiple identities and more. Helping students to recognise success beyond achieving grades is a core aspect of Unity College practice. This will be termed holistic success. Jane gives an example of this when she says:

... you really do grow and mature here. You do. I think every young parent should come here. Even if they do have qualifications. It really does show you life skills in every aspect. Cooking, cleaning... citizenship, you know (19, Interview 1, 11/11/10).

It is with these ideas in mind that I move into an exploration of the ways teaching and learning are carried out at Unity College, to encourage and promote holistic success.

### **A culture of accompaniment, encouragement, reward and recognition**

The importance of relationships has been highlighted throughout this thesis. The roles of various staff at Unity College and their place in the school community have been expanded on. This was considered a vital precursor to students' desire to engage in their academic and non-academic school work. The importance of relationships has been identified by Meyer et al. (2010) as it relates to feeling valued within a cultural grouping; I have applied that to identities as teen parents and learners. As mentioned in previous chapters, these relationships and this feeling of being valued for who they are and what they bring to the learning conversation opened students and participants' minds to the pathways they could explore, and are the foundation upon which successes could be built (Roxas, 2008). More concretely, staff at Unity College actively promoted and modelled a culture of accompaniment, encouragement, reward and recognition, to motivate and inspire pregnant and parenting teens to aim for success in their lives. Because students value their relationships with staff, they took on board the encouragement and accompaniment and used it to reframe the ways they could be successful at school. This model is so ingrained in staff practice that it is also enacted by students and has become self-perpetuating. Before I discuss these in more detail I

would like to note that these concepts are interrelated and are difficult to classify as distinct and separate.

### Encouragement

Unity College has expectations that all of its students will succeed. This was a major theme of the first round of participant interviews, and informed the questions written into the second round. High expectations of students is a consistent theme in culturally responsive teaching and learning practice (Gay, 2002; Bishop, 2003, 2007; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Macfarlane et al., 2007; Bishop et al., 2009; Meyer et al., 2010). One aspect of encouragement comes from the strength of teacher/student relationships, which has been discussed elsewhere in this thesis. Where students value teachers' thoughts and opinions, they work hard to please them (Hallman, 2007; Macfarlane et al., 2007; Roxas, 2008; Bishop et al., 2009; Meyer et al., 2010). The combination of teacher/student relationships and teacher encouragement has created a culture of encouragement in the Unity College classroom. At the time of my research the school had been operating as a Teen Parent Unit for approximately ten years. Staff encouragement of students is well-established school practice, and has led to student encouragement of each other. With a ten year school history, current students could also see the outcomes of this encouragement and the hard work of their peers. Participants described this as a motivating factor in their desire to succeed. Lucy and Jane both said:

L - It pushes me, and so I just get it done. And it even pushes me to get, like not just finish it, but try and get above that level like a Merit or an Excellence.

J - ...it's sorta good because you go in there and you know [teachers] know what they're doing and you, you see other students that are doing so well that have been there for a while, and they're going off to university, some of them getting scholarships and stuff like that, it's sorta like well they know what they're doing, they, they want you to succeed, and it's sorta like, well, you lead me in the direction and I'll, I'll do the work (Lucy and Jane, Interview 2, 16/12/10).

Students at Unity College, such as the four participants in this research, often come from a background of not engaging in school, or having negative experiences of high school. Chelsea described being left behind academically, Shelley experienced bullying, Lucy saw no clear learning path so felt there was no point to anything she was doing. The Unity College



culture of encouragement and modelling of success works to protect students from their past experiences and opens their eyes to new ways of operating. Staff utilise their students' identities as parents as a motivating factor to engage them in their work. Take for example, Jane's experience of high school prior to pregnancy and parenting:

My problem [with high school] was I didn't have the motivation. I didn't have something there that was like yeah, you can do it. I just wanted to party. You know I wanted to get stoned and bunk and I wanted to get drunk all the time and hang out with my friends. Live life, you know. I was thinking oh I'm 15, I'm 16 years old you know, I'm old enough to you know move out and do whatever I want to. You know? ...old enough to have sex, I can do whatever I want (Jane, 19, Interview 2, 16/12/10).

This lack of motivation was turned around at Unity College. In Jane's case, having autonomy over her choices alongside the encouragement provided by teachers made the difference. "...[Teachers] do lots of little things to hint at us, to help us.... It's, sort of like, they say some words that implant in our heads... and it's like a seed that grows and grows and grows, and we learn from it" (19, Interview 1, 11/11/10). The experience of 'hints' rather than being directed to do 'A' or 'B' was a revelation that Jane found transformative. Chelsea and Shelley described the same appreciation for having control over their choices. For students who are teenagers on the one hand, and parents in adult roles on the other, the freedom to explore their educational autonomy was a validating experience. This is consistent with other examples of culturally responsive practice in New Zealand (Bishop, 2003, 2007; Macfarlane et al., 2007; Bishop et al., 2009; Meyer et al., 2010).

Those students with no interest in 'academic' study discovered space in the school week for singing (Fieldnote, 18/11/10), spending time and achieving credits by helping out in the Early Learning Centre (Participant observation, 25/11/10), playing sports (Fieldnote, 02/12/10), learning te reo Māori, getting a drivers' licence (Fieldnote, 25/11/10), and more. Students are encouraged to explore their interests and as they discover an area that they find rewarding, this is channelled into their academic lives. Where possible NCEA credits are gained, otherwise students are encouraged to use their passion and experiences in their English writing and speeches (Participant observation, 12/10/10). Both Jane and Lucy described recognising the importance of their identities as parents as motivating factors, encouraged by the school's acknowledgement that their choices affect their children's' lives (Participant

observation, 25/11/10). Staff at the school challenge society's deficit constructions of teen parents and instead utilise the desire young parents have of a better life for their children to encourage and motivate them to succeed. As Lucy puts it:

And if I wasn't a young mother then I definitely wouldn't be, like the way I am now. I do it for Aroha's sake. Cos at the end of the day, what I do she has got to go through it too! No matter what, she has to live through it. So it's better to be positive for her (19, Interview 1, 11/11/10).

This reframing of teen parent identity as a motivating factor for success, rather than prevailing deficit constructions, creates a space for educational transformation to occur. With a ten year history of young parents achieving high school qualifications, enjoying parenting and succeeding as parents and young people, Unity College encourages its students to create a space for success in their lives.

### Accompaniment

Participants placed importance on the amount of time each teacher was able to spend with them as part of an environment that enabled them to succeed. The experience of teacher accessibility contrasted with student experiences at their previous high schools. Unity College as a Teen Parent Unit, like other 'second chance' or 'alternative' education providers in New Zealand, is funded at a teacher to student ratio of one to ten. Unity College had the equivalent of three fulltime teachers and 30 fulltime students. However, with relatively high student absences, often relating to child health, and with part-time rather than fulltime employed teachers, there were often more teachers present in the classroom than this ratio describes. With a little Director creativity, such as working the weekly programme to ensure that more teachers were present at certain times and not others, for example during dance practice, sport or citizenship programme times (Hindin-Miller, 2012, personal communication), student participants described feeling that they had unfettered access to their teachers, and therefore to learning. This meant that all students experienced significant periods of one-on-one support from each teacher.

[Teachers] have a more personal aspect to everything you're, it's just the whole one on one thing. They really, what I like about here, they really concentrate on you. And um, that just pushes you harder because you know

there's someone really supporting you to get better. Like to get your grades up, you know, get some NCEA Level stuff and, and you're just excited. They make you excited about doing things, like Maths, *laughs* (Jane, 19, Interview 1, 11/11/10).

Feeling excited about academic work is a common thread described by all participants. This is evidence of an educational transformation effected at Unity College. All participants also described not having this sense of excitement at previous high schools. The ability to transform a student's desire to learn, and have them actively excited about subjects they have previously had no interest in is a success in itself. In Shelley's case, teachers made the difference:

[Teachers] offer you more support and help [at Unity College]. And the other teachers just give you stuff and then just let you go.... And that doesn't really teach us much.... [At Unity College teachers] [g]ive you different ways of learning it. But at [previous] High School they'd just give it to you and say find your own way to learn it (Shelley, 14, Interview 1, 18/11/10).

Chelsea described the importance of one-on-one time with teachers for her pacing and ability to focus:

I can work at my own pace which is so much better cos you get that extra learning support. Like at high school if someone gets it and you're a bit behind they move on, so you lose focus on everything. Whereas here they help you until you understand fully, which is good (19, Interview 1, 09/11/10).

An aspect of the one-on-one teacher attention that allows for students to get excited about their work is the way the classroom week is structured. Every Monday morning students get into tutor groups that are assigned at the start of each year, and set goals with their lead teacher. These goals are recorded and shared with the other teachers, who are then able to assist the young mums to stay on track. The goals start as small weekly aims and are focussed to ensure that students can achieve what they are aiming for in a complete academic year. If a student wants to be a florist, the lead teacher shares with the other teachers this overall goal and all teachers who work with the student ensure that they have a clear pathway to achieve

their result (Participant observation 01/02/11). All participants highlighted the significance of this in their feelings of support and success. Chelsea put it this way:

[Teachers have] pushed me. They've helped me set my goals, like weekly goals, so I know what I want to do week by week and term by term. Yeah. And we've worked that around Oscar and everything else. So, everything else in life (19, Interview 1, 09/11/10).

Participants also described their admiration for the behind-the-scenes work carried out by teachers, who were able to assist in tracking goals outside their subject areas. All of these practices fit with the Te Kotahitanga model of professional development. Unity College predates the Te Kotahitanga project, but both are examples of New Zealand situated culturally responsive practice. Caring for students, expectations of success and goal setting in particular (Meyer et al., 2010), with Individual Education Plans that are tracked and followed up by all teachers, are an important part of students feeling focussed and successful.

### Reward and recognition

Support and accompaniment helped students at Unity College to focus on goals and success, but the area that really excited all students was the culture of reward and recognition. In every interview, at the school prizegiving, during observations of classroom life students delighted in celebrating each other's, their children's and their own successes. Space was created in the classroom for sharing children's developments, such as eating solids for the first time (Fieldnote, 11/10/10), or getting a new tooth. Space was also created for sharing parenting successes like getting a child to eat a new vegetable (Participant observation, 07/02/11), or creating/maintaining a pattern of reading daily with one's child/ren. Quitting smoking, learning to drive, getting rid of negative influences such as a 'bad' boyfriend (Artefact, 25/11/10), were all able to be shared and celebrated. This extended to sporting and academic successes as well. Staff at Unity College took the time to get to know what was important to their students.

Rewards and recognition ranged from simple acknowledgements to standing ovations and shared food. One of the most lauded celebrations was reserved for those students who achieved 100% attendance, or the highest attendance at the school. That student received respect for being able to organise themselves and their family to a high level, something that

challenges most parents regardless of age, and received prizes like children's books or book vouchers (Participant observation, 25/11/10). The use of the classroom whiteboard meant that everyone knew when someone else had achieved something.

J – Every time someone gets a Merit or an Excellence they put it on the board.

L – Or just an Achieved. H – Or, or yeah, just, just something that they've done that's great, they've stuck it on the board so everyone knows. J – [You might have] your name up there twice, three or four times. They've got it, well before we left I'm pretty sure everyone's name was on the, on the board (Jane & Lucy, 19, Interview 2, 16/12/10).

The sharing of food was particularly exciting to all students, and enabled everyone to share in the success of the school. 'Morning tea Monday' was used as an incentive for any student who achieved an Excellence grade or a comparable high level achievement. It also gave students the sense that everyone was succeeding at school.

J - ...all the students are excelling here, like in their school work. L - Like if we get an Excellence, morning tea on Monday.... [L]ast term... every Monday we had morning tea because there was always an Excellence. J - And I had two morning teas! Yeah (Jane & Lucy, 19, Interview 1, 11/11/10).

This sharing of successes empowered students because they saw their friends and peers, who were in the same situation as themselves, achieving at high levels. The celebration encouraged the students who had achieved the success and motivated other students to achieve success. It showed all students that success as a pregnant or parenting teen was not only possible, it happened every week. Regardless of academic ability or interest, all students at Unity College were able to feel successful in one or many of their identity roles. Students studying Home Economics, or excelling in hospitality, put on the morning tea, and were celebrated for doing so in the process of celebrating the student/s who had achieved Excellence (Participant observation, 22/11/2010).

### **Creating a space for success**

Unity College has done a lot of work to create an environment free from barriers, in which young parent students have the space and autonomy to learn who they are, what is important

to them and then are supported to achieve and excel in that and any other arena of their choice. As mentioned repeatedly throughout this thesis, society has low and negative expectations of teen parents. Unity College has actively worked to reframe deficit teen parent identities and enable its students to reframe who they are and want to be. It also operates to make students feel successful in different ways. One aspect of the environment Unity College has created is the development of a culture of encouragement among staff and students alike. This encouragement extends to those who excel at academics, sport, as parents, or in assisting in the ELC. It applies to those who excel in te reo and te ao Māori, the school citizenship programme, singing and dancing. It also extends to students who are skilled in personal organisation and can manage their and their child/ren's attendance. All of these areas are valued, and any student who is excelling in any area is recognised and rewarded. For students who have previously disengaged from school, or 'failed', been excluded and/or 'dropped out', encouragement and recognition are crucial to keeping them engaged in school with all the protective factors that a strong community and social support services offer them and their children (Paki, 2002; Collins, 2005; Hallman, 2007; Poelzleitner, 2007; Roxas, 2008; Wylie et al, 2009). Encouragement and accompaniment, reward and recognition helped focus students on their goals and allowed the young parents to dream and aim higher than many had ever considered before. In Lucy's case, when I asked her about what she wanted from life prior to her pregnancy, she had no recollection of any hopes or dreams. Having been encouraged at Unity College, she now wants to work for the Ministry of Social Development. Several days after I asked her about her pre-pregnancy dreams, she got back to me with this response:

I remembered what I wanted when was in high school, I wanted to eat out of one of those white cardboard boxes with the metal handles. A noodle box. That's what I wanted to do when I grew up. Just once eat out of one of those boxes (19, Interview 2, 16/12/10).

The combination of support and encouragement, the motivation to aspire to great heights for the sake of her child, alongside a culture of reward and recognition at Unity College helped transform Lucy's goals and expectations of herself.

## **Biographies of educational transformation**

I have talked about the ways Unity College has created a culture of success with its students; I would now like to look at short biographies of each of the four participants in this research, as concrete examples of educational transformation. By transformation I mean the changes that have occurred in the participants' expectations of themselves, as well as their academic achievements, as a result of their time spent at Unity College. This transformation was identified by the young women themselves when comparing their current, positive high school experiences with their previous, negative experiences of mainstream schooling.

### Chelsea

At the time of our interviews Chelsea was 19 years old. She was in her last month of high school at Unity College, having achieved her NCEA Levels 2 and 3, and a Tertiary Studies Course. She had attended Unity College for two years. Her son, Oscar, was two and a half years old. Chelsea described herself as "European" (19, Interview 1, 09/11/2010); she became a mother at 17, during her final year at high school. At the time of her arrival at Unity College, Chelsea had achieved NCEA Level 1, and had several credits at NCEA Level 2. She had attended one high school, a girl's school, from Year 9 to Year 13 and had not engaged there, or achieved comparable results to those she routinely accomplished at Unity College. She does not recall getting beyond an Achieved grade at her mainstream high school. Both of her parents are high school graduates with tertiary level qualifications.

Chelsea lived at home with her parents, whom she described as "very supportive" (19, Interview 1, 09/11/2010), and planned to move into her own accommodation with Oscar, once she had completed her studies. She has a partner; he is not the father of her child. Chelsea had Oscar in the middle of the school year and took the rest of that year off. In that time she attempted to do school by correspondence, but found it too challenging. She heard about Unity College through a colleague of her mother's. She rang the school and visited with her mother before she enrolled. Her desire to attend a Teen Parent Unit addressed her need for a clear goal focus:

...I knew what I wanted to do and I knew that if I wanted to make this happen then I had to... finish my Level 2, 3 and get my Uni Entrance. That's what I

wanted and that's what I've done, so that's good (19, Interview 1, 09/11/2010).

It also addressed her desire to be self-sufficient for herself and her son in a supportive environment: "I wanted to be with people who were in the same situation as me and finish my school work so that I could support myself and Oscar" (Interview 1, 09/11/2010). Chelsea is an example of a highly motivated student, who underachieved in her mainstream high school environment and flourished when she had the opportunity to set weekly goals, have autonomy over her learning and one on one teacher support. At the time of our last meeting, Chelsea had achieved her NCEA Levels 2 and 3, passed her Tertiary Studies Course with an A+ grade, and received a scholarship for academic excellence at the Unity College prize-giving. This scholarship was contributing financially to her tertiary degree, which she had just begun.

### Shelley

When I met Shelley, she was 14 years old and in the initial stages of pregnancy, approximately 14 weeks in. She had completed Year 9 at the high school which hosts Unity College, and was close to completing Year 10. She had experienced bullying at high school prior to becoming pregnant, by both teachers and other students. She was one of two pregnant students at Unity College; the other was pregnant with her second child. She was not yet showing outward signs of her pregnancy. Shelley was the youngest student at Unity College. At the time of our first interview she was in her fourth week at the school.

Shelley was not sure how she would describe her ethnicity. When asked she said:

S – ...I don't know. I'm actually not sure of what I want to be cos, yeah... that's a confusing one for me.... [S]ometimes I get told that I've got Māori in me, and the other times I'm just, you know, white.. European? R – So what do you think of yourself? S – I don't know, not sure yet. (14, Interview 1, 18/11/2010)

Shelley regularly described herself as in a state of 'becoming'. She was not sure who she was, or who she wanted to be, but she was confident that Unity College would help her discover these things.



Shelley lived at home with her mother and her brother. Her father also lived and worked in the area. She had a partner who is the father of her child. While one of Shelley's parents completed high school, neither attended a tertiary institution. Her father was working in manual labour; her mother ran her own business from the family home.

Shelley was familiar with the Teen Parent Unit, having attended the host school, and knew several students who were attending the school before she arrived. She was nervous about starting, but wanted a second chance at her education because of her pregnancy. During the course of our time together, Shelley discovered that she was expecting a little boy, whom she gave birth to during the writing stage of this thesis. She also gained NCEA Level 1 credits and achieved Excellence marks for the first time in her high school career, in subjects in which she had previously had no interest. Shelley became a student who could achieve at the highest level and discovered a love of Maths in particular, which she had formerly 'hated'. Her educational transformation can largely be attributed to working in an environment where she felt safe, supported and accepted.

### Lucy

At the time of our first interview, Lucy was 19 years old and Aroha was two and a half. Lucy became pregnant at 16 and had Aroha at 17. Lucy had attended Unity College for one year, having been referred through a teen parent support service and previously attended another Teen Parent Unit in the same region. She did not enjoy the environment at that TPU, describing it as having no 'heart' and being strictly focussed on schooling and curriculum. She enlisted assistance to find an option that suited her better. Lucy had attended two mainstream high schools prior to enrolling at Unity College, both school changes were based on geographic moves. Lucy and Aroha lived with her mother, her stepfather and two of her siblings.

Lucy was emphatically single, and did not have contact with Aroha's father. He did not have contact with Aroha, nor did he provide any financial support for his child (his choice). When asked, she identified as "European/Māori" (19, Interview 1, 11/11/2010). Her experience of Unity College was helping her to reframe her cultural identity:

Well it's made me, like, open up to learning more Māori. Cos growing up I did not like being a Māori. I was always dissed at primary school, man that sucked (19, Interview 1, 11/11/2010).

In contrast to her primary school experience, Lucy cautiously explored Māoritanga at Unity College, where karakia are a daily occurrence, the childcare centre respects and develops tikanga Māori and te reo Māori is taught, weekly, in the classroom. To her surprise, she delighted in the opportunity to do the karanga (welcoming call) for the Minister of Social Development (a teen parent herself), during a visit to Unity College. She represented her school and challenged the Minister about her decision which had resulted in reduced funding for the Unity College Early Learning Centre. This success was much celebrated by her classmates and teachers alike.

When she arrived at Unity College, Lucy had achieved a small number of credits at NCEA Level 1. She had not engaged in school academically, and was delighted to have transformed her school experience at Unity College, where she had attained Achieved and Merit grades. She was not certain whether either of her parents had finished high school, but thought that her mother was likely to have. Her father went on to the army. At the time of writing, Lucy was not interested in talking about her father. Her mother and stepfather were both employed in fulltime work.

Lucy's aim in being at Unity College was to:

[Get] everything I need, like NCEA... the whole lot, university entrance.  
Yeah.... I just [want] to get a better education. And I want to be Ministry of Social Development, so I need my education! (19, Interview 1, 11/11/2010)

At the time of our last meeting Lucy was starting a new academic year. She was excited about working towards her goal of qualifications at NCEA Levels 2 and 3, and was still focussed on a career within the Ministry of Social Development. She had also just been appointed as one of two Student Leaders for the coming school year, based on her strengths of friendliness, welcoming and hospitality.

## Jane

When she was first interviewed Jane was 19 years old. She was “16 when I got pregnant, 16 when I had her” (19, Interview 1, 11/11/2010). Ruby turned 3 between our first and second interviews. In Jane’s words, “I’d call myself a kiwi” (ibid).

When we met, Jane was enrolled at Unity College for the second time. She had previously attended for one term, having been referred to the school by an external agency that supported teenaged mothers. Her enrolment was cut short due to a drug and alcohol related incident in which another student died. After this she had a seven month break before re-enrolling.

...after [my] first term I was involved in a car crash, here with [another student] and after that I sort of went downhill and um, then I had a break and I changed my life, changed everything about me, and I came back... cos, I knew what the experience was like last time, and I really wanted to push myself and come back here and get a good life for me, and my daughter (19, Interview 1, 11/11/2010).

Jane’s experience at Unity College helped her focus on her drug and alcohol rehabilitation for both her and her daughter’s future.

Jane attended two high schools prior to enrolling at Unity College, one of which was a boarding school. She described herself as “...a student that was really naughty at school you know, getting expelled and suspended and... all the bad stuff” (19, Interview 1, 11/11/2010). Despite not engaging in her education, she had achieved NCEA Level 1 and received Excellence grades before starting at the Teen Parent Unit. She described her schooling experience as varied, having enjoyed primary school, but lost interest by high school, particularly as she attended a known ‘low decile’ and ‘troubled’ school. She found herself distracted by social dynamics:

...I went from normal primary school, normal intermediate and then to [a low decile high school] which is really hard out.... And when you’re in high school there’s all that, you know, the girlfriend/boyfriend relationships, trying

to get up to school standards, trying to please the teachers, trying to please your friends, all that sort of stuff (19, Interview 1, 11/11/2010).

Jane lived with her daughter and grandparents, having a 'distant' relationship with both parents. As far as she understood, her mother had finished high school and gone on to university. Her father did not complete high school and went straight into the army.

She was emphatically single, describing her relationship with Ruby's father:

I was with him and then I got pregnant and I didn't know about it and I dumped him before I found out.... And...then my friends were like oh, why don't you just go back out with him, do it for Ruby ra ra ra, so I did and that lasted 3 months and there was no kissing, there was ground rules, no kissing, no sex and no touching. Laughs.... And um then I didn't see him for about a year.... [H]e's an awesome dad, sucky boyfriend. And he took a while to grow up just like me, but yeah he really does realise that he loves Ruby and, you know, what he needs to do for her.... [Now] he has [Ruby] every holidays. And he sends me money when I need it. (19, Interview 1, 11/11/2010)

Jane's peer group had a strong influence on her school and life choices. Being in an environment where everyone was encouraged to strive and achieve helped her to focus her talents positively. At the time of our last meeting Jane was the proud recipient of the Unity College academic award for English. She was in a committed relationship and expecting her second child.

All of the participants in this study described a lack of engagement and interest in their former, conventional high schools; all were engaged and excited by the possibilities they saw for themselves at Unity College. This excitement extended to future possibilities for themselves and their families. Participants' expectations of self, expectations of partners, attitudes to their own abilities, all were transformed by their experiences at Unity College.

## **Chapter 5 – Discussion and conclusion**

My aim in this study has been to detail, explain and interpret pregnant and parenting teens' understandings of the ways in which their school supports success. I have attempted to document the experiences and perspectives of the four participants at the heart of this research and to provide young parents, educators, social support services and educational and social policy makers with a detailed analysis of an approach that has made, and continues to make, a significant difference in the lives of a group of pregnant and parenting teens and their children. I have attempted to represent the authentic voices of the young parent students at Unity College in a way that might benefit young mums and those who work with them.

In this thesis, I have explored quantitative and qualitative teen parent research, research into teen parent education and New Zealand Teen Parent Units. I have shown that much of the research conducted 'on' young parents constructs them as a 'problem' (Schinke, 1998; Fergusson & Woodward, 2000; Woodward et al., 2001a; Woodward et al., 2001b; Amin et al., 2006); a failing of individuals and their families, with economic implications for individuals and the state. I have shown the evolution of this construction of teen parents, from the 'unwed mother', to the teen mother; from a moral problem, to a racial problem, to a health problem and now an economic problem. I have considered research with a focus on education as a challenge to these 'deficit' constructions of teen pregnancy, on the basis that education provides opportunities and improved outcomes for both teen parents and their children (SmithBattle, 2006; Roxas, 2008; Wylie et al., 2008). My intention throughout this thesis has been to position my research alongside other research that uses a strengths-based analysis of teen pregnancy and parenting.

I need to note that while I have been interested in writing a strengths-based thesis, it is not accurate to suggest that all of the students who attend Unity College have developed the same qualities of resilience, or the same aspirations for excellence. Some of the teen parents face incredible difficulties in their lives, which in some cases are overwhelming. Not all of the teen parents have achieved their NCEA Levels 1, 2 and 3, not all have passed their academic courses. Not all students have taken on a role as successful parents. While a transformation of attitudes and adoption of expectations of success is largely the case, occasionally barriers such as drug and alcohol dependence, or complicated child or parent developmental issues challenge young parents' ability to believe in their capacity to succeed. Regardless of

outcomes it was my observation that all the young women appreciated being in a positive, loving environment and were hopeful of improving their life paths for the benefit of their children.

### **My choice of design**

When thinking about how to conduct this study, I was not convinced that the qualities that contributed to a school culture of success could be documented and then immediately replicated en masse. Quantitative research claims that conclusions are generalizable (Bell, 1993; Mutch, 2005; Stark & Torrance, 2005; Burgess et al., 2006), yet when policy changes have been made, expected outcomes have not always been achieved. Generalizable conclusions may not take into account a variety of contexts or factors that relate to specific groups of people, schools or even classrooms. Instead my interest lay in the personal experiences and insights offered by a group of young pregnant and parenting students within one context. I wanted to study this group in depth, in their educational setting, which led me down the path of using a ‘case study’ approach. I wanted to access the voices of these students to honour their experiences and value their understanding of their school community environment. It was my hope that the data I collected would be “rich in description of people, places, and conversations... [collected] with[out] specific questions to answer or hypotheses to test” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 2). Throughout the research process it has been of the utmost importance that the words of the participants are used wherever possible to explain their understandings of a culture of success. While this might not be ‘generalizable’ (Bell, 1993; Mutch, 2005), it should be ‘relate-able’ (Mutch 2005). A case study methodology allowed me as researcher to take setting – the place where this culture of success was being developed and practised, into account (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Mutch, 2005).

### **Culturally responsive pedagogies**

In Chapter 1 – Introduction and review of literature, I have argued that the Unity College classroom can be viewed as a culture-in-the-making, based on the idea that students live, grow and learn with their class for a period of their lives (Green et al., 2011). This idea aligns itself with Gay’s views of the need for teachers to build a ‘learning community’ (2002) in classrooms. Gay is interested in culture as ethnicity, but I have argued that her pedagogical principles also relate to the Unity College classroom. She talks about the need for teachers to respect and understand the positionality of students in their classrooms; where they are

coming from, and what they bring to learning conversations. With this perspective, teachers are in a position to utilize what students know and value and channel it into their learning. In order to do this, teachers must care enough about students to create a warm, inviting learning community (Gay 2002). I see this caring learning community as what Macfarlane et al., (2007) call *manaakitanga*, or an ethos of care, and what Bishop et al., (2009) call using student voice.

I have argued that at Unity College this culturally responsive pedagogical practice has been applied by providing pregnant and parenting teens with unyielding support, accepting students for all of who they are, understanding that multiple identities are being played out in the classroom at all times, and expecting success in all aspects of students' lives. It has meant staff caring for the students and their children, breaking down transactional teacher/student relationships and replacing them with relationship centred learning. It has included understanding that, on arrival at the Teen Parent Unit (TPU), students often had a negative association with school and schooling, regardless of ability. I have also shown that research in New Zealand and internationally has found that, rather than ending a teenager's academic life, pregnancy can become a contributing factor to young pregnant and parenting teens' renewed interest in their education (Collins, 2005; Hill et al., 2005; Zachry, 2005; Hallman, 2007; Scholl, 2007; Roxas, 2008; Cubey, 2009).

In my reading, I found that culturally responsive pedagogies provide a 'formula' for culturally located student success. Different academics represent this with different discourses, but as I understand it, this 'formula' looks at the importance of teachers developing genuine relationships with students that affirm and value their cultural identities. This enables students to bring their identities into their classroom and learning conversations. The 'formula' also requires teachers to have high expectations of student success, provide support to achieving success, and where possible provide individual students with goal setting sessions. If these 'criteria' are met, then teachers have removed barriers to education and academic success should follow (Gay, 2002; Bishop, 2003, 2007; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Macfarlane, 2004; Macfarlane et al., 2007, Roxas, 2008; Bishop et al., 2009; Meyer et al., 2010).

In relation to Unity College, I have shown that teachers play a significant role in developing the school 'learning community'. They build connections with all of their students and nurture connections between the young parents. They create time and space for genuine

relationships to emerge, and foster environments that allow students to be all of who they are. Personal lives are accepted as part of the fabric of who each young parent is, and teachers walk alongside their students in both their school and private lives. Staff acknowledge that at any given time, Unity College students are thinking as teenagers, as adults, as mothers, partners, daughters and more. Acknowledging the multiple identities that their students are playing out has enabled Unity College to operate as a community/whānau.

### **Social constructionism and the reframing of deficit constructions of teen pregnancy and parenting**

Unity College was created to cater to the unique needs of pregnant and parenting students. Teachers, the support worker and receptionist, the ELC staff and students all play roles in the school community/whānau. Based on participants' interviews and my own observations, I have argued that this community/whānau offers protection to the young parents, sheltering them from negative societal perceptions and expectations, and reframing what it is that pregnant and parenting teens can work for and achieve. This idea of the ability to reframe identities, and challenge a fixed construction of who and what teen parents 'are', stems from social constructionist theories. Without the development of each of the Unity College staffing roles, the school community/whānau would not operate as successfully or effectively. Students and staff all value the holistic support that is offered by having a TPU which removes barriers to accessing school, and caters for the multiple roles and identities that young parents are navigating on a daily basis. This has enabled staff and students to model and encourage success in all aspects of students' lives, challenging societal expectations of young parents. Integral to this reframing of young parent identities as successful, are the techniques teachers employed to engage and assist their students to build trust and a belief in their own ability to succeed.

### **Second chance education**

"We need to rise to the challenge and develop practical approaches to address the critical need for second chance education for all our young students who have fallen out of the system" (Baragwanath, 1998, p. 14).

This quotation is written by a New Zealand pioneer in the field of teen parent education. Susan Baragwanath created the first recognised school for teenage mothers in New Zealand,



my parent created the second such school. When Baragwanath wrote this quotation, there were four known Teen Parent Projects, including the two mentioned here, which were all pilots for what became, in the 2000s, Teen Parent Units. Three of those Projects are still in existence, including Susan's and Unity College (Hindin-Miller, 2012). Baragwanath is highly regarded as having lead the way in teen parent educational policy, being a vocal advocate (Hindin-Miller, 2012, personal communication) for the need to look at the realities of students' situations and provide education accordingly, challenging a 'one size fits all' approach. Both participants and I believe that Unity College leads the way in terms of Teen Parent Unit practice, and is an outstanding example of what Baragwanath was envisioning.

### **My experience of this research process**

In embarking on a Master in Education degree I needed to commit to an area that would capture my interest for the duration of a thesis. At the time, I did not know that my thesis would be put on hold by two pregnancies, thus far one birth, with another expected in a month's time, child rearing, several major earthquakes, more aftershocks than I can recall, three moves including one between cities, the purchase of our first house, a new work role and more. Fortunately I chose an area of study that I have lived with for a long time, in fact, grown up with: teenage pregnancy and education. One of my parents started a study group that evolved into a school for teenage parents. The study group began when I was fourteen years old. That parent is a lifelong patron of the school, but her daily work relationship ended when I was twenty-seven, so I have lived with, supported, advocated for and been challenged by teen pregnancy and parenting for more than fifteen years. My adolescence was shaped by the embryonic form of the school; I studied for my Bursary and University Entrance exams alongside the young parents at Unity College who were doing the same (and parenting to boot). In submitting this thesis, one of my aims has been to challenge deficit research and literature on teenage pregnancy and parenting, and give authentic voice to the experiences of a group of young people who are much judged, and much less listened to. In writing this thesis, I am sure that my personal perspectives have coloured the tone and language choices that I have made. I do not believe that teen pregnancy is a problem in and of itself. I see that there are a variety of factors, including socio-economic disparities, which can make parenting challenging for any age group. In using the word 'problem' in association with teen pregnancy, I have tried to clearly articulate that I consider myself among a group of

academics and researchers who critique deficit constructions of pregnant and parenting teens, instead focusing on areas that develop strength and resilience.

## **Conclusion**

All social constructions have implications for lives and living. Dominant or privileged constructions have material effects on real peoples' lives. When teen pregnancy is constructed as a problem, pregnant and parenting young women are constructed as irresponsible, morally 'loose', a cost to society and a danger to their own children. The effects of these kinds of constructions include policies about welfare and education, the ways teen parents are portrayed in the news and media, societal expectations of young parents and more. Throughout this thesis I have chosen to adopt a strengths-based construction of pregnant and parenting teens, in the same way that participants have chosen to take on this reframed identity. Prior to arriving at Unity College, these pregnant and parenting teens and their families often 'took on' the negative constructions, such as the idea of 'babies having babies'. An important part of the work of Unity College is to offer new possible constructions of teen pregnancy and parenting, some of which are based around culturally responsive pedagogical practice. Culturally responsive pedagogies provide a useful tool for educators and policy makers to think about the ways curriculum and pedagogy might be organised in Teen Parent Units. They offer a pedagogical framework that resists an impulse to direct the things teachers might do and say, because the point is to be responsive. This responsiveness is at the heart of a socio-cultural perspective on teaching and learning.

I have argued that the work of this TPU is consistent with the aspirations of the Te Kotahitanga project in looking at the co-construction of new meanings made possible in new contexts. I have suggested that this socio-cultural perspective on teaching and learning is consistent with the Key Competencies in the New Zealand Curriculum (2007), while often being in tension with traditional views of teaching and learning which emphasise the importance of academic outcomes. This is also in tension with strict socio-economic views of education, which do not allow for the importance of educational transformations that do not fit the classroom attainment mould. Most importantly, I have shown that through attending Unity College the lives of individual young women can be successful in many ways, together with the lives of their new families and communities. Jane and Lucy summed up their sense of themselves as successful young women and mothers as follows: "Mana wahine! We are

strong! And we love our children, and we would do anything for our children” (Interview 1, 11/11/2010).

## Appendix A – Median and average ages of first time NZ mothers 1962-2009

<b>Median and Average Age of First Time Mothers<sup>(1)</sup></b> <i>Nuptial and total live confinements<sup>(2)</sup></i> 1962–2009			
December year	Nuptial		Total
	Median age (years)	Average age (years)	Median age (years)
1962	22.8	23.9	..
1963	22.7	23.7	..
1964	22.8	23.6	..
1965	22.8	23.6	..
1966	22.6	23.4	..
1967	22.6	23.3	..
1968	22.6	23.4	..
1969	22.7	23.4	..
1970	22.8	23.5	..
1971	22.9	23.4	..
1972	23.0	23.5	..
1973	23.2	23.7	..
1974	23.4	23.8	..
1975	23.7	24.1	..
1976	23.9	24.4	..
1977	24.3	24.7	..
1978	24.4	24.9	..
1979	24.7	25.1	..
1980	24.8	25.3	..
1981	25.0	25.4	..
1982	25.2	25.6	..
1983	25.5	25.9	..
1984	25.8	26.2	..
1985	26.1	26.5	..
1986	26.4	26.8	..
1987	26.6	27.0	..
1988	27.0	27.3	..
1989	27.3	27.5	..
1990	27.5	27.7	..
1991	27.9	28.0	..
1992	28.2	28.4	..
1993	28.5	28.6	..
1994	28.7	28.9	..
1995	29.0	29.2	..
1996	29.1	29.3	..
1997	29.4	29.5	..
1998	29.6	29.7	..
1999	29.9	29.9	..
2000	30.0	30.1	..
2001	30.1	30.2	..
2002	30.5	30.4	..
2003	30.6	30.5	..
2004	30.7	30.6	28.4
2005	30.8	30.7	28.4
2006	30.9	30.7	28.2
2007	30.6	30.6	28.0
2008	30.4	30.5	27.7
2009	30.4	30.5	27.8

## Appendix B – NZ birth rates by age of mother 1962-2010

December year	Age of mother (years)							
	Under 15 <sup>(2)</sup>	15–19	20–24	25–29	30–34	35–39	40–44	45+ <sup>(3)</sup>
1962	0.2	53.7	265.4	258.7	152.3	74.9	23.4	2.0
1963	0.3	57.0	256.0	247.5	146.5	73.2	22.0	1.4
1964	0.3	56.9	241.8	229.9	135.1	68.8	21.3	1.5
1965	0.3	58.7	230.2	214.8	120.1	61.4	19.5	1.4
1966	0.4	64.6	219.9	208.5	112.0	56.5	17.3	1.4
1967	0.5	66.7	214.7	209.8	107.0	51.5	16.1	1.6
1968	0.4	66.1	217.5	207.8	106.7	49.5	14.6	1.3
1969	0.3	64.6	212.5	206.0	106.9	47.8	14.3	1.0
1970	0.4	64.0	209.0	200.0	99.9	45.4	12.4	1.0
1971	0.3	67.9	210.8	200.1	102.1	41.3	12.2	0.9
1972	0.3	69.1	199.0	188.1	92.4	39.7	10.9	0.8
1973	0.4	64.0	184.3	176.6	83.9	33.9	9.2	0.7
1974	0.4	60.3	175.1	166.0	76.0	30.3	7.5	0.5
1975	0.5	54.7	158.4	157.5	69.8	25.1	6.9	0.6
1976	0.5	49.8	152.1	151.9	68.9	22.9	6.1	0.5
1977	0.4	46.9	145.6	151.6	69.9	22.0	6.1	0.3
1978	0.4	43.3	133.8	143.2	67.3	21.3	5.2	0.4
1979	0.4	41.1	132.3	152.9	70.2	21.9	4.8	0.4
1980	0.3	38.2	127.0	146.6	68.3	21.2	4.3	0.4
1981	0.3	38.0	123.1	146.6	69.9	20.2	4.4	0.2
1982	0.3	34.3	113.9	144.3	70.6	21.2	4.2	0.4
1983	0.3	32.4	110.2	142.5	72.8	20.8	4.1	0.3
1984	0.3	30.4	106.0	147.0	77.0	21.9	4.2	0.3
1985	0.3	30.4	104.1	145.2	79.1	22.4	3.8	0.3
1986	0.2	30.2	105.1	143.7	85.7	24.1	4.0	0.3
1987	0.3	31.8	105.6	145.3	91.6	27.1	4.3	0.3
1988	0.2	31.8	105.9	148.5	98.3	30.9	5.0	0.3
1989	0.3	33.6	103.1	149.9	100.1	32.0	5.2	0.4
1990	0.3	35.0	103.0	149.1	106.8	36.7	5.3	0.3
1991	0.2	33.9	95.2	140.9	105.0	37.9	5.9	0.3
1992	0.2	32.9	91.0	135.9	107.4	39.2	6.2	0.3
1993	0.2	32.2	88.8	133.5	107.6	40.3	6.3	0.3
1994	0.3	31.4	83.4	127.4	106.0	41.4	6.9	0.4
1995	0.3	33.4	83.0	123.4	106.1	43.5	7.2	0.4
1996	0.2	33.0	81.2	119.2	105.3	44.6	8.0	0.4
1997	0.4	32.8	79.1	116.1	108.0	47.4	8.8	0.4
1998 <sup>(4)</sup>	0.2	29.2	75.3	110.6	107.1	48.1	8.5	0.4
1999	0.2	28.9	77.4	114.9	112.3	51.0	9.6	0.4
2000	0.2	28.2	77.5	113.5	113.1	52.5	10.1	0.4
2001	0.2	27.5	76.1	113.3	111.7	53.7	10.4	0.5
2002	0.2	25.5	70.1	105.3	109.9	54.7	11.1	0.5
2003	0.2	25.9	68.6	107.7	112.4	58.7	12.1	0.6
2004	0.2	27.1	70.4	107.8	117.5	60.2	12.1	0.6
2005	0.2	27.2	67.6	104.9	117.1	62.3	12.0	0.6
2006	0.2	28.1	70.8	105.1	119.2	63.6	12.3	0.7
2007	0.3	31.3	75.8	113.8	127.3	70.5	13.8	0.7
2008	0.3	32.8	78.1	112.1	125.9	72.0	13.9	0.7
2009	0.2	29.4	76.8	107.4	123.5	70.1	14.5	0.6
2010	0.2	28.8	76.6	109.1	126.3	71.6	15.3	0.8
1.	Per 1,000 mean estimated female population in each age group.							
2.	Per 1,000 mean estimated female population aged 10–14 years.							
3.	Per 1,000 mean estimated female population aged 45–49 years.							
4.	Rates for 1998 are lower than expected because of a small change to the rate at which births were registered during 1998.							

## Appendix C – Abortion rates in New Zealand by age 1991-2010

Abortion rates by age of woman <sup>(1)</sup>													
1991–2010													
December year	Age group (years)												
	11–14	15–19	20–24	25–29	30–34	35–39	40–44	45+ <sup>(2)</sup>	Total abortion rate <sup>(3)</sup>	Median age (years) <sup>(4)</sup>			
Series ref: ABNA	S20GRPAD	S20GRPBD	S20GRPCD	S20GRPDD	S20GRPED	S20GRPFD	S20GRP GD	S20GRU2D	S20ABRTD	S30XMIEDD			
1991	0.4	15.9	23.8	17.9	12.8	8.4	2.4	0.2	406.7	25.1			
1992	0.4	16.0	23.2	18.7	12.6	8.0	2.5	0.2	406.5	25.2			
1993	0.5	16.6	24.3	18.5	12.7	8.4	2.6	0.2	417.4	25.1			
1994	0.4	18.5	26.7	19.8	13.4	8.7	2.8	0.2	450.7	25.0			
1995	0.4	19.7	28.9	20.9	14.0	8.9	3.0	0.3	479.2	25.0			
1996	0.6	22.0	31.3	22.2	15.0	9.4	3.2	0.3	519.3	25.0			
1997	0.5	21.9	32.8	22.9	15.4	9.7	3.6	0.2	534.2	25.2			
1998	0.6	21.3	32.8	23.1	15.5	9.8	3.1	0.2	531.6	25.3			
1999	0.5	21.4	34.6	24.1	16.0	10.2	3.9	0.3	554.2	25.5			
2000	0.7	23.1	35.7	24.5	16.4	11.4	4.1	0.3	580.4	25.4			
2001	0.6	23.8	36.9	25.9	16.8	10.9	3.9	0.4	594.9	25.2			
2002	0.6	25.6	38.8	26.4	17.4	10.8	4.4	0.4	621.3	24.9			
2003	0.7	25.9	41.1	27.9	18.0	11.6	4.3	0.3	648.2	24.7			
2004	0.7	25.4	39.1	26.8	17.0	12.0	4.3	0.4	628.7	24.7			
2005	0.7	24.6	36.2	26.5	16.4	11.0	4.1	0.3	600.8	24.7			
2006	0.9	25.8	36.5	26.4	16.7	10.9	4.1	0.3	608.2	24.5			
2007	0.9	26.6	37.2	26.2	17.5	11.0	4.0	0.4	619.0	24.5			
2008	0.7	26.0	36.7	25.8	16.2	10.7	4.1	0.3	601.2	24.3			
2009	0.7	24.5	35.6	24.9	16.5	10.5	4.2	0.3	583.3	24.4			
2010	0.7	21.6	33.4	23.4	16.0	10.4	4.0	0.3	547.3	24.6			

## **Appendix D – Information sheets and consent forms**

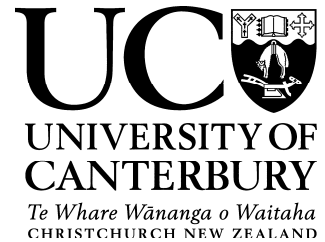
### **Consent Form for 14 – 17 year old Participants**

Rebecca Hibbert

University of Canterbury

Email: [rym10@uclive.ac.nz](mailto:rym10@uclive.ac.nz)

Phone: 0800 VARSITY



### **How do young parents and their teachers negotiate cross cultural boundaries at a Teen Parent Unit?**

I have read the Information Sheet concerning this study, talked with Rebecca and understood what this research is about.

I know that:

1. My participation is voluntary and I can withdraw at any time.
2. Should I choose to withdraw from this study, Rebecca will do her best to remove any of the information relating to me from the project, including the final publication, as long as that is achievable.
3. My name and the name of my school will be kept confidential and no identifying details will be included in any presentations or published material.
4. Interviews will be recorded and I can ask that the recording be stopped at any time. I can also request a copy of the interview transcript to check its accuracy and make changes as I see fit.
5. I do not have to participate in any part of the discussion if I do not want to.
6. If I raise safety issues regarding myself, my children or other people during the interviews, Rebecca will first discuss these with me, then with her supervisors. Further action may be taken if necessary.
7. Raw data that is collected will only be accessed by Rebecca and her supervisors. Data will be held securely and kept for a minimum period of 5 years following completion of the project, and then destroyed.

8. The findings of this research may be presented at conferences and will be written up as a piece of academic work.
9. I will be provided with either the full report, or a summary of the findings of this study.
10. If I have any complaints about the research I can contact the Chairperson of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee . University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch. Email: [human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)
11. My parent/s have also given consent on their consent forms.

*This project has received ethical approval from the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee.*

I agree / do not agree to take part in this study.

Signed.....Date.....

Name (Please print).....

Please return this signed and dated consent form to:

Rebecca Hibbert

C/O University of Canterbury



## **Consent Form for Parents of 14 – 17 year old Participants**

Rebecca Hibbert

University of Canterbury

Email: rym10@uclive.ac.nz

Phone: 0800 VARSITY



### **How do young parents and their teachers negotiate cross cultural boundaries at a Teen Parent Unit?**

I/We have read the Information Form concerning this study and understood what it is about.  
I/We understand that I/we can ask for more information at any time.

I/We know that:

1. A full explanation of this project has been provided to my daughter, so that she understands what is required of her. Students have had an opportunity to ask any questions they would like answered.
2. The participation of my daughter is voluntary and she can withdraw from the research at any time.
3. The researcher will do her best to remove any of the information relating to any student who withdraws from the project, including any final publication, provided that this remains practically achievable.
4. The name of my daughter and of the Teen Parent Unit and its host school will be kept confidential and will not be disclosed or used in any published material.
5. Interviews will be recorded. My daughter can ask that the recording be stopped at any time. She can also request a copy of the interview transcript to check its accuracy and make any changes.
6. My daughter does not have to participate in any part of the discussion if she does not want to.
7. If safety issues regarding my daughter, grandchild/ren or other people are raised during the interviews, the researcher will first discuss these with my daughter, then with her supervisors. Additional agencies may be contacted in order to support research

participants.

8. Raw data that is collected will only be accessed by the researcher and her supervisors. Data will be held securely and kept for a minimum period of 5 years following completion of the project, and then destroyed.
9. The findings of this research may be presented at conferences and will be written up as a piece of academic work.
10. My daughter will be provided with either the full report, or a summary of the findings of this study.
11. If I have any complaints about the research I can contact the Chairperson of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee . University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch. Email: [human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)

*This project has received ethical approval from the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee.*

I agree / do not agree to my daughter taking part in this study.

Signed.....Date.....

Name (Please print).....

Please return this signed and dated consent form to:

Rebeccah Hibbert

C/O University of Canterbury

## **Consent Form for Participants**

Rebecca Hibbert

University of Canterbury

Email: rym10@uclive.ac.nz

Phone: 0800 VARSITY



### **How do young parents and their teachers negotiate cross cultural boundaries at a Teen Parent Unit?**

I have read the Information Sheet concerning this study, talked with Rebecca and understood what this research is about.

I know that:

12. My participation is voluntary and I can withdraw at any time.
13. Should I choose to withdraw from this study, Rebecca will do her best to remove any of the information relating to me from the project, including the final publication, as long as that is achievable.
14. My name and the name of my school will be kept confidential and no identifying details will be included in any presentations or published material.
15. Interviews will be recorded and I can ask that the recording be stopped at any time. I can also request a copy of the interview transcript to check its accuracy and make changes as I see fit.
16. I do not have to participate in any part of the discussion if I do not want to.
17. If I raise safety issues regarding myself, my children or other people during the interviews, Rebecca will first discuss these with me, then with her supervisors. Further action may be taken if necessary.
18. Raw data that is collected will only be accessed by Rebecca and her supervisors. Data will be held securely and kept for a minimum period of 5 years following completion of the project, and then destroyed.
19. The findings of this research may be presented at conferences and will be written up as a piece of academic work.

20. I will be provided with either the full report, or a summary of the findings of this study.
21. If I have any complaints about the research I can contact the Chairperson of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee . University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch. Email: [human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)

*This project has received ethical approval from the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee.*

I agree / do not agree to take part in this study.

Signed.....Date.....

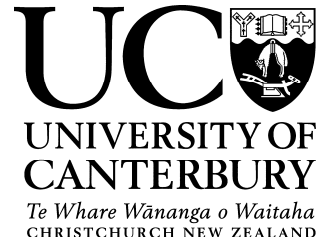
Name (Please print).....

Please return this signed and dated consent form to:

Rebecca Hibbert

C/O University of Canterbury

**Consent Form for the Board of Trustees and Principal of the Host  
School, and Director of the Teen Parent Unit**



Rebecca Hibbert

University of Canterbury

Email: rym10@uclive.ac.nz

Phone: 0800 VARSITY

**In What ways does a Teen Parent Unit create a culturally responsive environment for its students?**

We have read the Information Form concerning this study and understood what it is about.  
We understand that we can ask for more information at any time.

We know that:

1. A full explanation of this project has been provided to all participants, so that they understand what is required of them. Students have had an opportunity to ask any questions they would like answered.
2. Participation in the study by students of the Teen Parent Unit is voluntary and they can withdraw at any time.
3. The researcher will use her best endeavours to remove any of the information relating to any student who withdraws from the project, including any final publication, provided that this remains practically achievable.
4. The names of participants and of the Teen Parent Unit and its host school will be kept confidential and will not be disclosed or used in any published material.
5. If participants raise issues regarding their own, their children's, or other people's safety during the interviews, the researcher will first discuss these with them, then with her supervisors. Additional agencies may be contacted in order to support participants.
6. Raw data that is collected will only be accessed by the researcher and her supervisors. Data will be held securely and kept for a minimum period of 5 years following completion of the project, and then destroyed.

7. The findings of this research may be presented at conferences and will be written up as a piece of academic work.
8. All participants will be provided with either the full report, or a summary of the findings of this study.
9. Students, the Director of the Teen Parent Unit, the Principal and Board of Trustees can get more information about this project from the researcher.
10. If there are any complaints about this research, please contact the Chairperson of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee . University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch. Email: [human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)

*This project has received ethical approval from the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee.*

We agree / do not agree that members of the Teen Parent Unit may be invited to take part in this study. We also agree / do not agree to relevant documentation being used for analysis in the study.

Signed.....Date.....

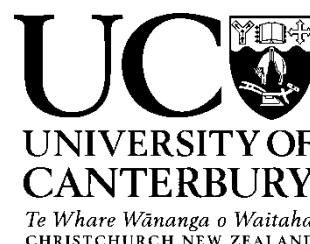
Name (Please print).....

Please return this signed and dated consent form to:

Rebeccah Hibbert

C/O University of Canterbury

## Information Sheet for Participants



### How do young parents and their teachers negotiate cross cultural boundaries at a Teen Parent Unit?

#### What is the study about and why is it important?

My name is Rebeccah Hibbert, and I am studying for my Master of Education, at the University of Canterbury. I am interested in looking at the interactions between teachers and students at a Teen Parent Unit, and hearing students' perspectives on the ways teachers engage their students in learning. If you agree to participate in this research, you will be asked to participate in two interviews outside of school time, which will last about an hour each. I would like to talk about your reasons for attending the Teen Parent Unit, your previous educational background, and your thoughts on the ways your teachers negotiate cultural barriers with you. I would also like to observe your interactions with your teachers at school on ten or twelve occasions.

Interviews with you will be recorded and then transcribed. You will be able to see the transcriptions and make changes to them. You will also be invited to have input into the interpretation of interview material. Once this research is complete, you will be provided with your choice of the full report, or a summary of the findings of this study.

It is hoped that the results of this study will contribute to a growing, New Zealand-based pool of research into Teen Parent Units, and will be of interest to many people in the field of education. It is also likely to be of interest to all those who work with young parents and their children. Another aim is that this project will challenge some of the negative stereotypes which have been applied to teenage pregnancy and parenting through academic and medical research.

#### Your rights

It is important that you know that your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You are able to withdraw from this research at any time. I will do my best to remove any information relating to any student who withdraws from the project, including any final publication, provided that this remains practically achievable.

You are welcome to have a support person with you at any interview if that would make you feel more comfortable. Any areas that relate to Māori, Pasifika or any other culture will be discussed with people who have agreed to act as my cultural advisors. These areas ensure that

your rights and best interests as a participant in this research are respected. This is of primary concern to me.

#### Maintaining privacy and anonymity

Your anonymity will be ensured through the use of a name, or names, of your choice. Other details about your identity which are not relevant to the research will be changed, such as the gender of your child or children, so that you can remain anonymous. The name of the Teen Parent Unit will also be altered for the purposes of this research. Real names will not be written in any article, or the final thesis. Only myself and my two supervisors will have access to your real name, and that of the other participants. All documentation such as interview transcripts and field notes will be held securely and kept for a minimum period of 5 years following completion of the project, and then destroyed.

#### How do you find out more about this study?

This project has been approved by the University of Canterbury's Educational Research and Human Ethics Committee. It has also been discussed and approved by my supervisors, Dr Kathleen Quinlivan and Dr Missy Morton.

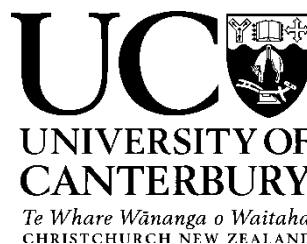
If you have any questions, or would like further information about the study please contact me on 0800 VARSITY or by email [rym10@uclive.ac.nz](mailto:rym10@uclive.ac.nz). You are also welcome to contact either of my supervisors: Kathleen Quinlivan 364 2987 extension 4829

[kathleen.quinlivan@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:kathleen.quinlivan@canterbury.ac.nz). Missy Morton [missy.morton@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:missy.morton@canterbury.ac.nz).

If you have any complaints about this research, please contact the Chairperson of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee . University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch. Email: [human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)



**Information Sheet for Parents of  
14 – 17 year old Participants**



**How do young parents and their teachers negotiate  
cross cultural boundaries at a Teen Parent Unit?**

What is the study about and why is it important?

My name is Rebeccah Hibbert, and I am studying for my Master of Education, at the University of Canterbury. I am interested in looking at the interactions between teachers and students at a Teen Parent Unit, to see the ways teachers engage their students in learning.

If you agree to your daughter participating in this research, you will be agreeing to me interviewing her twice outside of school time, for about an hour per interview. I would like to talk about your daughter's reasons for attending the Teen Parent Unit, her previous educational background, and her thoughts on the ways teachers negotiate cultural barriers with students. I would also like to observe interactions between your daughter and her teachers at school on ten or twelve occasions.

Interviews will be recorded and transcribed and participants will be able to see, check and alter the transcripts. Students will also be invited to have input into the interpretation of interview material. All participants will be provided with either the full report, or a summary of the findings of this study.

It is hoped that the results of this study will contribute to a growing, New Zealand-based pool of research into Teen Parent Units, and will be of interest to many people in the field of education. It is also likely to be of interest to all those who work with young parents and their children. Another aim is that this project will challenge some of the negative stereotypes which have been applied to teenage pregnancy and parenting through academic and medical research.

Participants' rights

All participants will be made aware that participation in this research is voluntary. I will do my best to remove any information relating to any student who withdraws from the project, including any final publication, provided that this remains practically achievable.

Any areas that relate to Māori, Pasifika or any other culture will be discussed with people who have agreed to act as my cultural advisors. This should ensure that participants' rights and best interests are respected. This is of primary concern to me.

### Maintaining privacy and anonymity

Your daughter's anonymity will be ensured through the use of a name, or names, of her choice. Other details about her identity which are not relevant to the research will be changed, such as the gender of her child or children, so that she can remain anonymous. The name of the Teen Parent Unit will also be altered for the purposes of this research. Real names will not be written in any article, or the final thesis. Only myself and my two supervisors will have access to the real names of the participants. All documentation such as interview transcripts and field notes will be held securely and kept for a minimum period of 5 years following completion of the project, and then destroyed.

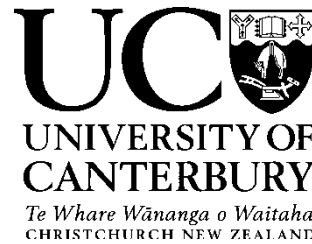
### How do you find out more about this study?

This project has been approved by the University of Canterbury's Educational Research Human Ethics Committee. It has also been discussed and approved by my supervisors, Dr Kathleen Quinlivan and Dr Missy Morton.

If you have any questions, or would like further information about the study please contact me on 0800 VARSITY or by email [rym10@uclive.ac.nz](mailto:rym10@uclive.ac.nz). You are also welcome to contact either of my supervisors: Kathleen Quinlivan 364 2987 extension 4829 [kathleen.quinlivan@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:kathleen.quinlivan@canterbury.ac.nz). Missy Morton [missy.morton@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:missy.morton@canterbury.ac.nz).

If there are any complaints about this research, please contact the Chairperson of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee . University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch. Email: [human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)

**Information Sheet for the Teen  
Parent Unit's Board of Trustees,  
Principal and Director**



In What ways does a Teen Parent Unit create a culturally responsive environment for its students?

What is the study about and why is it important?

My name is Rebeccah Hibbert, and I am studying for my Master of Education, at the University of Canterbury. I am interested in looking at the interactions between teachers and students at a Teen Parent Unit, to establish students' perspectives on the ways teachers engage their students in learning.

Students will be asked to participate in two hour-long interviews about their reasons for attending the school, their previous educational background, and their perspectives on the techniques their teachers use to negotiate cultural barriers with them. These will be conducted outside school time. I would also like to carry out ten or twelve observations of the way teaching and learning happens at the Teen Parent Unit. This may involve viewing relevant documentation such as classroom posters or feedback given to students on assignments.

Interviews will be recorded and transcribed and participants will be able to see, check and alter the transcripts. Students will also be invited to have input into the interpretation of interview material. All participants will be provided with either the full report, or a summary of the findings of this study.

It is hoped that the results of this study will contribute to a growing, New Zealand-based pool of research into Teen Parent Units, and will be of interest to many people in the field of education. It is also likely to be of interest to all those who work with young parents and their children. Another aim is that this project will challenge some of the negative stereotypes which have been applied to teenage pregnancy and parenting through academic and medical research.

Participants' rights

All participants will be made aware that participation in this research is voluntary. I will use my best endeavours to remove any information relating to any student who withdraws from the project, including any final publication, provided that this remains practically achievable.

Any areas that relate to Māori, Pasifika or any other culture will be discussed with people who have agreed to act as my cultural advisors. This should ensure that participants' rights and best interests are respected. This is of primary concern to me.

Maintaining privacy and anonymity

The names of the participants and the name of the Teen Parent Unit itself will all be altered for the purposes of this research. Real names will not be written in any article, or the final thesis. Participants will be asked to choose several pseudonyms, to maximise anonymity in the research. Additionally, further blurring categories will be used to change personal details which are not relevant to the research, to maintain participants' anonymity. Only myself and my supervisors will have access to

participants' real names, and the name of the Teen Parent Unit. All raw data will be held securely and kept for a minimum period of 5 years following completion of the project, and then destroyed.

How do you find out more about this study?

This project has been approved by the University of Canterbury's Educational Research Human Ethics Committee. It has also been discussed and approved by my supervisors, Dr Kathleen Quinlivan and Dr Missy Morton.

If you have any questions, or would like further information about the study please contact Rebecca on 0800 VARSITY or by email [rym10@uclive.ac.nz](mailto:rym10@uclive.ac.nz). You are also welcome to contact either of Rebecca's supervisors: Kathleen Quinlivan 364 2987 extension 4829 [kathleen.quinlivan@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:kathleen.quinlivan@canterbury.ac.nz). Missy Morton [missy.morton@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:missy.morton@canterbury.ac.nz).

If there are any complaints about this research, please contact the Chairperson of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee . University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch. Email: [human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)

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